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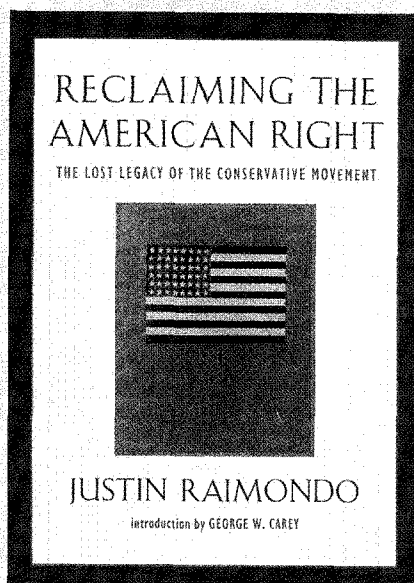


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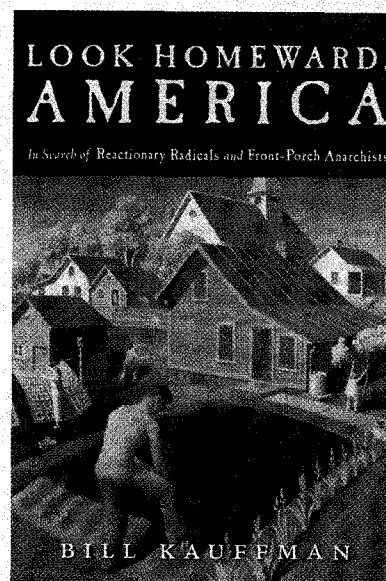
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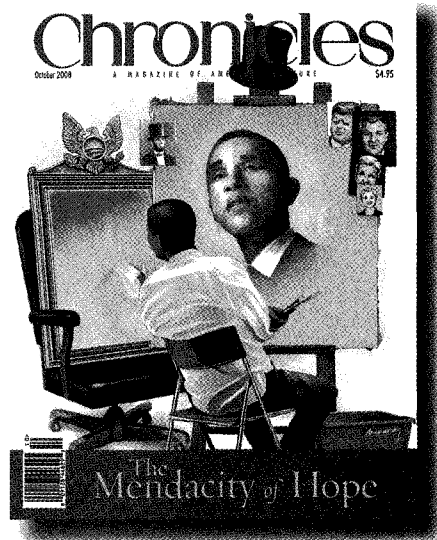


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Chronicles

A MAGAZINE OF AMERICAN CULTURE



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Cover by George McCartney, Jr.
Inside illustrations by Melanie Anderson.

EDITOR

Thomas Fleming

EXECUTIVE EDITOR

Scott P. Richert

SENIOR EDITOR, BOOKS

Chilton Williamson, Jr.

ASSOCIATE EDITOR

Aaron D. Wolf

DESIGNER

Melanie Anderson

INTERIOR ARTIST

George McCartney, Jr.

CONTRIBUTING EDITORS

*Katherine Dalton, †George Garrett,
Tom Landess, Tom Piatak, Joseph Sobran,
James O. Tate, Taki Theodoracopulos,
Clyde Wilson*

CORRESPONDING EDITORS

*Wayne Allensworth, Donald Livingston,
Roger D. McGrath, William Mills,
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EUROPEAN EDITOR

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LEGAL-AFFAIRS EDITOR

Stephen B. Presser

POETRY EDITOR

Catharine Savage Brosman

CIRCULATION MANAGER

Cindy Link

PUBLISHER

The Rockford Institute

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Chronicles

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Mexico Way

A NOVEL BY

Chilton Williamson, Jr.

When retired U.S. Customs Bureau in-
spector Samuel Adams White (to his
ex-wife, "the most boring human being") is
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standing of and sympathy for a people among
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Stumbling Into (Another) War

On August 26, Russian President Dmitri Medvedev recognized the independence of South Ossetia and Abkhazia. Washington has sharply criticized Moscow for this, while the European Union has threatened sanctions. Russia and Georgia have signed a ceasefire agreement stipulating that Georgian forces must move back to their bases, while Russian troops are supposed to withdraw to pre-conflict positions. The agreement, however, leaves the Russians some room to take additional "security measures," and reports continue to come in of Russian troops moving closer to Tbilisi.

The Bush administration has called for the withdrawal of Russian forces and has used the crisis to clinch a deal with Poland on deploying anti-missile-defense systems there. Moscow has responded by warning that this could make Poland a target. According to Polish Prime Minister Donald Tusk, the deal includes a clause about a "mutual commitment" between the two countries to come to each other's assistance "in case of trouble." Thus Poland, like other Eastern European states and former Soviet republics, especially Ukraine (along with the United States and Israel, Kiev has armed the Georgian army), is nervously watching events in Georgia.

"NATO's decision to withhold a Membership Action Plan for Georgia might have been viewed as a green light by Russia for its attacks on Georgia, and I urge the NATO allies to revisit the decision," said John McCain. (Georgia's Saakashvili also makes that claim.) One of McCain's top advisors is a former lobbyist for Georgia, and in mid-August, Saakashvili stated that he talks to McCain "several times a day." On August 13 Russia's *Izvestiya* blamed American neoconservatives for the war, with Vice President Cheney and McCain playing the main roles in the plot to "whip up anti-Russian hysteria" and help McCain

win the November election. Without naming names, Vladimir Putin made a similar charge in an interview with CNN. But Barack Obama has also endorsed continuing the process of bringing Georgia into NATO. In view of the stakes, a dispassionate review of the conflict in Georgia might give readers a chance to decide for themselves where American interests lie and who is to blame.

Neoconservatives have been conspicuously anti-Russian. Nevertheless, Washington sources say that Saakashvili was repeatedly warned by administration officials not to use military force. Briefly, both disputed territories wanted independence from Georgia, if not incorporation into the Russian Federation. Moscow took a hand in the 90's to insert itself into the dispute as a peacekeeping force. Following the collapse of the Soviet Union, Washington continued to press for NATO expansion eastward as the Warsaw Pact broke up, deepening ties with Azerbaijan, Georgia, Ukraine, and the Baltic states, as well as former Soviet Central Asian republics. The West is interested in undermining Russia's control of oil and natural-gas pipeline routes in Eurasia, and Georgia has been an alternative route for oil from the Caspian basin. NATO membership would have solidified the alternative route through a security guarantee and weakened Moscow's hand.

Saakashvili has been frustrated by the reluctance of some NATO members to fast-track Georgian membership. The presence of Russian troops in the disputed territories was a particular cause of anxiety, but Georgia was set to press forward on a Membership Action Plan at the December NATO meeting. Meanwhile, Russia was strengthening her troop contingent in South Ossetia. President Bush, who has been Saakashvili's close ally, is set to leave office in January, and Tbilisi could not be sure how the elec-

tions would turn out or what a new president, especially Obama, might do. Saakashvili appears to have been counting on strong U.S. support in a confrontation with Russia, winning a media campaign that would cast Russia as the aggressor, with the West pressing for the Russians to leave the disputed territories. The case for NATO membership would be boosted, while Saakashvili could consolidate his position domestically.

Russia's rapid response suggests that the Georgia intervention was planned ahead of time. Military analyst Pavel Felgenhauer has claimed that Moscow began planning an assault in April, when a frustrated Vladimir Putin attended a Brussels NATO meeting and it became apparent that, in spite of Moscow's warnings, the West would eventually move forward on NATO membership for Georgia and Ukraine. According to Felgenhauer, the plan evolved toward a war that would remove Saakashvili and prevent Georgia's inclusion in NATO. Some sources have claimed that the Russians baited Saakashvili (by most accounts a hot-headed and impulsive man) by shooting down Georgian reconnaissance drones and firing on Georgian police and Georgian-populated villages in South Ossetia, though others have since reported that the provocations were likely not all from the Russian side. Russian military analyst Aleksandr Golts has written that both sides had done "everything" to "spark a military conflict."

Much remains unclear about the Russia-Georgia clash, but a close look at the available evidence suggests that there may be a "party of war" in Washington, Tbilisi, and Moscow. The game of bluff, saber rattling, and political maneuvering could pit the Western powers—or perhaps the United States alone—against Russia. Great powers have played such games before, stumbling into war. <

BAD HOMBRE GETS HIS

Only one thing would have been more gratifying than watching a filthy scumbag like José Ernesto Medellín wince as he felt the chilling gush of sodium thiopental run into his arm. That would have been watching him wiggle like a Mexican jumping bean as 2,000 volts of lightning fried him like an Old El Paso taco shell.

But alas, the hot squat is all but abolished. Instead we execute prisoners like dogs being put to sleep. The end result is the same, although in Medellín's case, only after 5,475 days of three hots and a cot. That's 15 years.

Medellín, you might recall, was the illegal-alien Mexican gangbanger who merrily helped rape and murder Jennifer Ertman, 14, and Elizabeth Peña, 16, in Houston, Texas, on June 24, 1993. As I wrote in this space in March, "For an entire hour, [Medellín and the gang] raped and sodomized the girls; 'The confessions of the gang members,' one account goes, 'indicated that there was never less than 2 men on each of the girls at any one time.' After the rape, the gang strangled Jenny with Sean O'Brien's red nylon belt. He pulled on one end while Medellín, O'Brien testified, pulled on the other until it snapped. They finished the job with Jenny's shoelaces. 'The bitch wouldn't die,' Medellín complained afterward. The gang also strangled Elizabeth with her shoelaces, and the coroner testified that they knocked out two of Elizabeth's front teeth. Then the gang members stomped their necks and kicked in Jenny's ribs. In another macabre twist, O'Brien showed up on videotape smiling amid a crowd watching investigators at the scene. Authorities found the girls' bodies, rotting in the Texas heat, four days later."

Medellín bragged about the crime, and four years after his unspeakable deeds, he discovered that the authorities in Texas had deprived him of his "right" to consult with Mexican diplomats. This, of course, led to appeals, and his case landed in front of the In-

ternational Court of Justice, which ordered the Bush administration to require the states to review 51 such capital cases. Texas refused. The U.S. Supreme Court sided with Texas and told the Bush administration it had no jurisdiction to meddle in the execution. Of course, the World Court had no jurisdiction either, but that didn't seem to bother the former governor of Texas, George W. Bush. Either way, Medellín got justice on August 5.

Naturally, globalists everywhere worked themselves into a pother, arguing that ignoring this *diktat* from a globo-court run by a Chinese judge might bode ill for Americans overseas—as if France would suddenly grab an American off the street, deny consular counsel, then execute him, all because Texas gave a criminal vagabond a dose of reality. Fat chance. Then again, if an American illegal immigrant in France did what Medellín did, he would deserve anything the Frogs dished out.

The anti-American left unbosomed themselves of the usual racial propaganda. Said David Fahti of Human Rights Watch, "that Mr. Medellín is Mexican rather than Swedish, does make a difference." Well, he's right about that. Eleven million Swedes haven't crashed the borders of the United States, and if they had they wouldn't have staged a crime wave tantamount to a declaration of war against American citizens.

But back to Señor Medellín. How evil was he? After the *Dallas Morning News* published an editorial arguing that Medellín should not be executed, anti-death-penalty activist Michael Denson, founder of the Catholic Death Row Ministry in Frisco, wrote a letter to the editor: "I was so sad after I read the editorial. If these were your two daughters, would you feel the same way?"

"I have met José Medellín. I wrote him. I have run a death row ministry in Texas for years.

"He has never shown any remorse. He has proudly confessed. I used to

be opposed to the death penalty until I met José.

"Where is your respect and sympathy for the victims and their families? You have not even mentioned the two girls this sick creep murdered, or their families.

"José Medellín found it convenient to be a Mexican citizen when he found out it could save him.

"What a disgrace to all the good, honest, law-abiding Mexicans.

"Execute him already. The girls, along with their families, deserve justice."

Indeed. And so did Medellín, at the tip of a hypodermic.

—R. Cort Kirkwood

OBAMIANITY 101

An understanding of sin is central to our embrace of Christianity and the saving work of Jesus Christ. Scripture clearly teaches that "the wages of sin is death; but the gift of God is eternal life through Christ Jesus our Lord" (Romans 6:23). Thus, knowing what sin is and repenting of it are essentials to the Christian walk.

According to the Westminster Shorter Catechism, "Sin is any want of conformity unto, or transgression of, the law of God." Similarly, the Catechism of the Catholic Church, quoting Saint Augustine, defines sin as "an utterance, a deed, or a desire contrary to the eternal law." Both Reformers and Catholics agree that the measure of sin is God's law and His commandments.

This understanding of sin should be Christianity 101. But in July, there was quite a buzz on the blogs when a *Chicago Sun-Times* reporter posted the text of a 2004 interview he conducted with then State Sen. Barack Obama. The interview focused on spiritual matters, and many of Obama's answers should shock orthodox Christians.

When asked to define sin, Obama replied that sin meant "being out of

alignment with my values.” As for the consequences of sin, Obama averred: “if I’m true to myself and my faith then that is its own reward[:]; when I’m not true to it, it’s its own punishment.” For Obama, sin is a transgression against himself, not against the Almighty, and it carries no long-term penalty.

Not surprisingly, Obama went on to explain that “there are many paths to the same place,” described Jesus as “an historical figure for me,” and questioned “the belief, certainly in some quarters, that people [who] haven’t embraced Jesus Christ as their personal savior that they’re going to hell.”

Unfortunately, most Americans (even a majority of those who describe themselves as Christians) probably would not disagree with Obama’s discourse on sin, salvation, and Christ. For example, despite Old and New Testament condemnations of sodomy, a June 2008 poll revealed that only 61 percent of American Protestants and 39 percent of American Catholics believe homosexuality is sinful.

In post-Christian America, the people and their leaders do not look to God’s Word to establish the bounds of proper behavior, but rather to themselves and to what feels right. In an increasingly individualistic, secular, and narcissistic culture, we should expect that even members of churches labeled Christian do not have the remotest idea about the fundamentals of the Faith or the work of Christ.

Obama’s discourse on faith should remind us that there is much work to be done—not in the political sphere, but in the spiritual. “The essence of unbelief,” according to theologian Cornelius Van Til, “is that man starts and finishes his interpretation about any and every aspect of life with the assumption of his own autonomy. The Christian, on the other hand, has been saved by the blood and tears of Christ from this God-insulting and self-destructing methodology.”

Orthodox Christians should be ever prayerful for the millions of Americans who, like Barack Obama, look to themselves rather than to God when contemplating sin and salvation.

—William Watkins

FEDERAL POLICE AGAIN

In the May issue, I asked, “Do We Want a Federal Police Force?” (*Views*). I pointed out that Congress is passing too many laws that duplicate traditional state criminal laws. The problem with this redundancy is that federal enforcement, like that at Waco and Ruby Ridge, is usually irresponsible.

The latest example of this is the “D.C. Madam” case.

Everyone should agree that stamping out prostitution in our nation’s capital is a task so daunting that Savonarola—the 15th century Dominican friar who tried to clean up Florence—would probably pass it by. Then why, on March 1, 2007, did the U.S. attorney for the District of Columbia indict Deborah Jeane Palfrey, who quickly became known as the “D.C. Madam”? The indictment charged that she had employed more than 100 women from 1993 to 2006, “for the purpose of engaging in prostitution activity with male clients, including sexual intercourse and oral sex in exchange for money.” The indictment threw in money-laundering and racketeering, but those charges rested on the illegality of prostitution.

In his closing argument, Daniel Butler, the federal prosecutor, asked the jury, “When a man agrees to pay \$250 for 90 minutes with a woman, what do most men expect in that time? In that context, it’s pretty clear most men want sex.” No doubt they do, whether there’s \$250 involved or not; but if local law enforcement doesn’t think the case worth prosecuting, why does the federal government bother? Savonarola thought his Bonfire of the Vanities would morally cleanse Florence. Were the federal prosecutors trying to do that for Washington, D.C.?

In April 2008, the U.S. attorney put 13 women on the stand who had worked for the madam ten years before when they were in their early 20’s. By the time of the trial, they were in their early 30’s with husbands, children, and careers. The federal prosecutors compelled them to testify—in graphic detail—under grants of immunity, which prevented them from re-

maining silent under the Fifth amendment. Said one woman, a commander in the Navy and single mother of three children, “I needed the money, yes I did.” She worked for the madam for six months. She was so nervous when testifying that the federal district court judge tried to reassure her: “Take two deep breaths and relax. Everything’s going to be okay.” Not exactly. Her testimony ended what the *New York Times* called the career of “an otherwise exemplary officer.” The trial, the *Times* noted, had been expected to embarrass influential clients, but instead had “been remarkable for the public humiliation of an accomplished but financially desperate Navy Officer who was paid \$130 a 90-minute session.”

The *Washington Post* reported: “The jurors have watched a procession of scared, mortified ex-prostitutes (13 so far) reluctantly take the witness stand, forced to reveal their secret former lives in intermittently graphic detail—a past each clearly hoped was buried forever. Most testified that they grew weary of the business in less than a year and quit.”

The D.C. Madam case ended on May 2, when Palfrey—facing a likely four to six years in prison—hanged herself in a shed while awaiting sentencing. That was the second suicide resulting from the case; in 2006, a University of Maryland professor who had worked for the madam committed suicide after the police arrested her. The federal prosecutors forced 13 women to reveal in their testimony exactly what services they provided clients. Before the trial ended, the feds had littered the landscape with destroyed lives—and had done it as carelessly as boys swat flies.

Back when the madam was indicted, the D.C. Yellow Pages listed hundreds of “escort” services. What was special about the D.C. Madam’s operation to attract federal interest? Nothing, apparently. Was the U.S. attorney simply showboating to sully some high-profile names? Probably, but all he picked up was a Republican senator from Louisiana and a deputy secretary of state.

The D.C. Madam’s business, un-

like the Emperor Club VIP that Eliot Spitzer patronized, was relentlessly middle class. The Emperor Club's glittering client list included governors and British nobility. Eliot Spitzer paid \$4,300 for a New York City girl to travel to Room 871 at the Mayflower Hotel. Spitzer is still waiting to see which way the U.S. attorney's untrammelled discretion will fall in his case. The D.C. Madam's prices were modest—\$250 to \$300 for 90 minutes, split 50/50 with the girls. The IRS had no kick because, although a cash business, the madam filed 1099's for the girls as independent contractors. She advertised in the D.C. Yellow Pages. She recruited the women by advertising in the University of Maryland student newspaper. During the 13 years of the indictment, the madam's average income was under \$160,000

per year.

Justice Louis D. Brandeis wrote in 1932, "It is one of the happy incidents of the federal system that a single courageous state may, if its citizens choose, serve as a laboratory, and try novel social and economic experiments without risk to the rest of the country." Local government can easily take care of the people's morals. They are closest to them and more likely to know what the people want. If California wants to permit some marijuana use or Oregon wants to experiment with assisted suicide, why should that bother anyone in Texas? If the District of Columbia wants to tolerate prostitution, why should that upset the federal government?

The Founding Fathers believed ordinary crimes should be handled by the states so local citizens could de-

cide what to make criminal and, with their votes, hold law-enforcement officials accountable for how the laws were enforced. No local government in America would have gone forward with the D.C. Madam case—it was expensive and pointless. The federal police force, on the other hand, is rich and unaccountable. Federal officials were as careless at Waco and Ruby Ridge as they were in the D.C. Madam case, with the same devastating results. They should keep in mind that, when the people of Florence had enough of Savonarola, they hanged and burned him.

—William J. Quirk

OBITER DICTA

Rockford Institute Vice President **Christopher Check** will speak on "Henry VIII's Divorce" on Sunday, October 26, at Saint Mary's Roman Catholic Church in Norwalk, Connecticut, at 7:30 p.m. Saint Mary's is located at 699 West Avenue. For more information call (203) 866-5546.

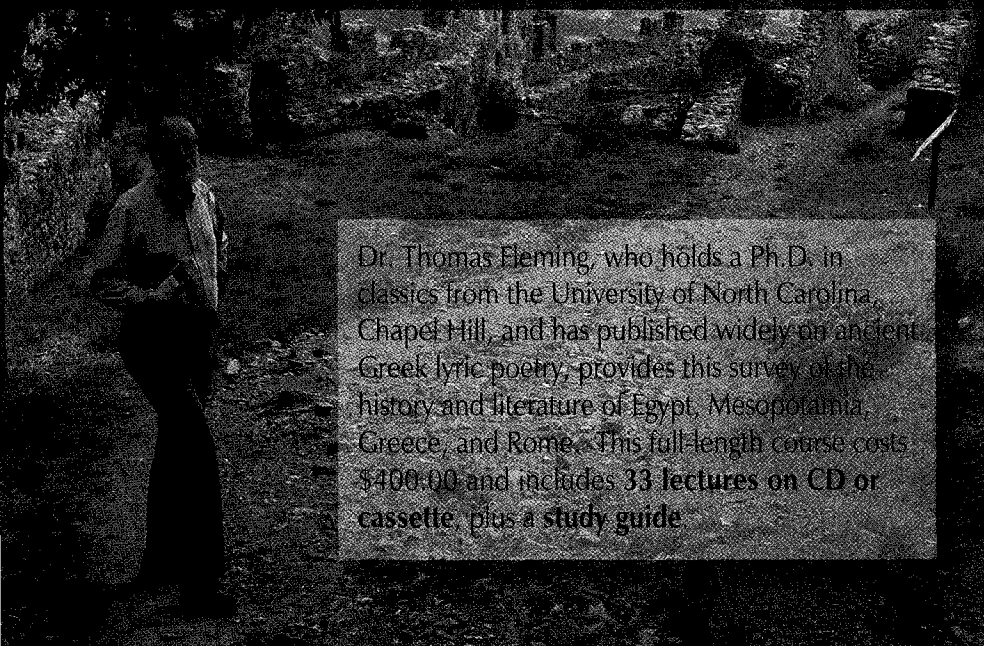
Paul Lake, who teaches English and creative writing at Arkansas Tech, has contributed two poems to this issue. His second collection of poetry, *Walking Backward*, was released by Story Line Press. He is also the author of *The Measured Word: Essays on Poetry and Science* (University of Georgia Press) and *Cry Wolf: A Political Fable* (Benbella Books). Mr. Lake has published poems in the *Formalist*, the *Hudson Review*, the *Sewanee Review*, and the *Paris Review*, among others.

Our cover art is provided by our interior artist, **George McCartney, Jr.** Mr. McCartney studied at the Metropolitan Museum of Art and received a bachelor's of art from the State University of New York at Geneseo. Since 1997, he has worked in various media in the fields of illustration, graphic design, and textiles. George currently resides in North Carolina with his wife, Kristin, and their children.

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California Condor

by Paul Lake

He flies almost as near to heaven
as a 747,
yet tangles like a kite in power lines

and camped beneath the dark clouds of extinction,
dreams of his former splendor
in the long-gone Pleistocene,

aware that his beleaguered kind
does not, like the great auk,
lack wings for flight,

nor intellect
like dodos, nor is it clumped
in scrumptious teeming flocks

like the short-lived passenger pigeon.
And yet, in desert gloom,
feeling extinction loom,

he thinks how cruel and unfair
it is to claim a little niche
in thinning air,

to make a nest of dead dry sticks
on barren rocks,
to dine on carrion

instead of steak,
to own but one
extravagance—a giddy head

for the poetry of dizzy heights—
and know such glory wasn't bred
for unsuccess,

but joy, pure joy
that makes your pallid face flush red,
your long curved throat

without a voice box, cry
its tragic note
to sea and sky

while in the tumult down below
your sun-baked perch
a gray torpedo

with gaping maw
and lidless eye
pierces the surf,

unfeeling of its soft caress,
like all his kind
raking a profit from the tide,

a cold heart beating in his chest
and one thought circling in his head:
success success success success.

Louder Than Words

by Paul Lake

Whenever I argue with people in ivory towers,
Saying, "Equal means equal, the way rules apply in a game,"
They smile and say such words are masks to disguise plays for power
And appear to expect me to slink a way, crippled by shame.

Yet if people proclaiming a principle so neatly stated
As *equal means equal* are playing a sinister game,
How more subtle than chess must be those who, until they're checkmated
By the twin knights of reason and truth, tilt the board's even plain.

The Audacity of Hate

Barack Obama has a problem, and if it were not for this one problem, he would easily be elected president. As it is, because of this problem, the impossible John McCain actually has a chance. The problem is white people. Yes, it is true that the majority of Obama supporters are white people, but most of them fall into the category of self-hating whites otherwise known as liberals. Since a liberal—as I never tire of quoting (from Robert Frost)—is someone who would not take his own side in an argument, liberals and leftists spend their lives betraying every attachment that might command the loyalty of ordinary people.

Rich liberals naturally support high taxes and extravagant government expenditures on the poor, preferably the undeserving poor. A male liberal—we can hardly call such creatures men—favors women's rights, heterosexual liberals favor "gay marriage," liberal parents care more about other people's children than they do their own, and European-American liberals prefer all cultures to that of Europe. They are Gilbert's "idiot who praises with enthusiastic tone, all centuries but this and every country but his own." And, if these idiots condescend to note their own skin color, they hate it, or at least they think they do.

Mr. Obama may or may not like the white liberals who burn incense to his TV images that fill up the evening-news broadcasts, but he knows he cannot stand the illiberal whites who have not yet learned to hate themselves. Obama spent two decades attending Trinity United Church of Christ and claimed its pastor, Jeremiah Wright, as his friend and mentor before discovering that Wright was an antiwhite bigot. Even a politician scheming for power must have occasionally turned his thoughts away from himself and paid attention to the sermons that routinely demonized whites.

Until Wright's racism became an issue, Obama idolized the man and absorbed his bigotry. He even borrowed his comically pretentious book title *The Audacity of Hope* from one of Wright's sermons. The Wright story does have its—if you will pardon the expression—lighter side. It is Obama's membership in Wright's "church" that has justified his claim to be a Christian, and his claim to be a Muslim. No one has called him on this, so far as I know, even Christians who are fully aware that the United Church of Christ has about as much to do with the historical Christian Faith as Reform Judaism has with the religion of Moses and Isaiah.

Some Christians have questioned Obama's creden-

tials as a Christian because of his support for abortion and infanticide, but in the UCC a woman's right to kill her children is part of the creed, perhaps the only article of faith (apart from support for "gay marriage") from which no dissent is permitted. When the UCC says "God is still speaking," they do not bother to explain why their god has been contradicting himself so much. I used to think black people had more sense than to put any stock in the great antichurch known as the United Church of Christ, but in joining the middle class, upwardly mobile blacks have apparently become as gullible and shallow as their white counterparts.

If membership in the UCC is the best argument Obama has for refuting the claim that he is a Muslim, he might as well go back to the Indonesian madrasa in which he studied. Otherwise, he would have to explain how the leader of the Nation of Islam came to speak at his supposedly Christian "church." But, I suppose, better Louis Farrakhan than Jeremiah Wright or Rick Warren or Pastor Joel Hunter, the "Christian" "conservative" who claims to be convinced of Obama's religious sincerity and offered a prayer at the Democratic Party's Pandemonium in Denver. No, I do not think Barack Obama worships Allah or any other "god" he cannot see in his own mirror. In the solipsistic universe he makes up from speech to speech, press conference to press conference, there is no god but Barack and Obama is his prophet.

When Obama and McCain emerged as front runners, I knew that I had forfeited any right I had to talk about politics. Up to that point I had always regarded myself, on the cynicism scale, as several points beyond H.L. Mencken when he famously observed that no one ever went broke underestimating the intelligence of the American people, but to my horror I realized that I had been too naive, too optimistic, too trusting. Democrats and Republicans were actually going to entrust their country to two of the silliest characters in the U.S. Senate, a body generally distinguished only for knavery, folly, and ignorance.

We have already taken our swings at McCain, but he at least has a distinguished résumé if not a distinguished career. But Obama? He was a political unknown in Illinois until the idiot Republicans, in one of their frequent fits of self-destructive frenzy, decided to run Alan Keyes against



him. That is how this Marxist nonentity entered the Senate, where he did nothing for a year or so and then decided that he was that any boy in America who could refuse to grow up, and become president. And, although he made Hillary Clinton appear to be a conservative or at least a pragmatist, people still voted for him. Who are they?

I understand why blacks vote for a black candidate, though by the same token Germans should revere the memory of Adolf Hitler and Georgians would have a statue of Stalin in his hometown. (Oops.) I can also understand why public-school teachers, social workers, and other welfare dependents vote for a politician who will certainly increase their income and power. But setting aside race loyalty, greed, and the *libido dominandi*, how could anyone hold his nose long enough to vote for somebody who talks in that smarmy adenoidal voice? When Obama gets on his pulpit, it sounds almost like he is swallowing his words in a sea of high-toned phlegm. He does not so much speak as (to quote what Alexander Wolcott once said of a theater audience) strum his catarrh. His self-righteous public persona should grate on the sensibilities of normal people. Worse than nails on a chalkboard, the Obama public voice is as disturbing as the voice of Mariah Carey played on the headphones of the person you are condemned to sit next to on the flight from Chicago to Paris. And yet, some otherwise normal people voted for him in the primaries and will vote for him again in the general election. Why—or, rather, how?

During the primary season I found myself in San Antonio. The driver my friend arranged for me was the chatty type who thinks his life history is bound to interest his passengers. He was, in fact, amusing, and he had knocked around enough to have seen a few things. He was white, although on the bohemian side, a fairly normal guy, and he was enthusiastic about Obama to the point of being inspired. Assuming the Freudian blank screen that is increasingly necessary, I asked him why. Well, he explained, anyone would be better than Bush.

That is not an easy argument to refute—except in the case of Obama and McCain. The one great comfort of this campaign is that we know the outcome: Whoever wins will turn out to be the worst president in American history. What I wanted to ask the driver, though, was how a working-class white guy could vote for a man who so obviously hates him and his people. He was, admittedly, not one of those gun-toting religious bigots Obama is so afraid of, but an Obama administration, backed by a Democratic Congress, will certainly do everything possible to enhance the opportunities of everyone who is not white while forcing white taxpayers—and, let us be honest, we do pay most of the taxes because we have most of the money—to fund Operation White Out.

Here is an allegedly true story “Overheard in New York City”:

Thug #1: Yo, I can’t wait for Obama to win the elec-

tion, yo! He gonna make white people illegal!

Thug #2 (stopping dead in his tracks): You one ignorant muthaf- - ka, ain’t you?

The first thug, though perhaps a dreamer, does at least reflect something of the hopes that are entertained in the event of an Obama victory.

The racial logic of the Obama campaign is far from new; it is as old as affirmative-action programs that ask white parents to take privileges away from their own children to give special assistance to the children of strangers, so long as the strangers belong to a different race. It is one thing to argue that we should practice charity toward the poor or even that we should be selectively more charitable, for one reason or another, to this or that group of poor people, but quite another to ask me to put the needs of my own children—along with those of my nieces and nephews, grandchildren and cousins, neighbors and friends—behind the needs of other people. However you describe affirmative action and minority set-asides, they represent a deliberate and systematic policy of discrimination against people like me in favor of people not like me simply because they are not like me. Such disgusting and immoral policies are worse than any form of racism I have encountered because they teach us to hate precisely those whom we are most supposed to love.

An electorate that accepted the affirmative-action policies imposed on it by the political class had already made a suicide pact. American whites simply cannot wait to be marginalized, and in the media the pundits are already reserving places in the internment camps—not just for you and me but also for themselves. One of the big news stories this summer was the revised date by which whites will be a minority in the United States. News readers and columnists could barely contain their glee and actually took some time off from extolling Obama to celebrate the end of their civilization. On ABC News Charlie Gibson and the gang were like small children at a birthday party, unable to decide which to eat first—the cake or the ice cream. “Oh boy,” you could hear their minds turning over, “first we elect Obama, and then we’re going to be aliens in our own country.”

Yes, I know. Only a bigot would describe the Obama campaign as an expression of antiwhite racism. Somebody, call the Southern Poverty Law Center so they can advance me in their rankings. Bigotry these days has nothing to do with the way you treat people or even with what you actually say. Bigotry is what they say you are thinking when they play your speech backward at half speed. As I have said long ago and many times, we have only two choices in America: The first is a society that is legally color-blind—that is, a political and judicial system that does not discriminate on the basis of race though it cannot, on the other hand, prevent people from following their personal whims in private life. This is what I have always advocated, and it may be one of many impossible dreams arising from the classical-liberal fantasy that must be dear to the hearts of

Americans. The other choice is a society that discriminates on the basis of race, which leaves any sane person no choice but to support the race of his children.

Christians, Catholics especially, will inevitably insist that such discrimination is contrary to the Faith. They are badly mistaken. The fact is that in a flawed world, we must defend ourselves, our families, our neighbors, and our fellow citizens from those who would prey upon them, whether the enemies are domestic criminals or foreign invaders. When distinctions, no matter how arbitrarily arrived at, are made, we have a duty to make sure that they are not used to cut against the interests of "our" people as opposed to "their" people. In the color-blind world of liberal theory, there would be no special programs privileging people of one color over another, and people like Jeremiah Wright and Al Sharpton would not be given a public forum. But when a movement has been created to marginalize and extinguish the group you happen to belong to, you are justified in protecting your own interests and in refusing to sign on to a suicide pact.

The universalism invoked so often by the Catholic left is a product of the anti-Christian Enlightenment that borrows Christian phrases and puts them to decidedly non-Christian uses. A good example is the pseudo-Catholic support for the welfare state, which invokes the Christian language of charity as a justification for imposing Marxist policies that destroy true charity. The choice that we face today is not between sentimental universalism—whether in its anti-Christian Marxist or pseudo-Christian form—and racialism, but between the historic Christian view, demanding justice and charity to strangers but also requiring us to fulfill our particular duties to family, friends, and fellow citizens, and two ideologies created in the Enlightenment, universalism and racial nationalism. One does not have to be a Marxist to practice charity—quite the contrary—and one does not have to be an anti-Christian bigot to protect one's children.

A friend of mine, whom I know as well as I know myself, recently had an experience that is a portent of things to come. He lives in what used to be a nice, quiet neighborhood. When a black pastor moved in across the street, my friend and his wife brought over a plate of cookies, but the new neighbors turned out to be fond of loud parties that often started late in the evening and went on until two or three in the morning. The entire neighborhood was increasingly upset. One single woman who called the police was accosted by the pastor, who threatened her if she ever complained again. She did not.

One night this summer my friend was one of many people who did call the police. They took their sweet time in arriving and then, since the neighbors (who apparently listen to a police scanner) quietened down a bit for the cops' benefit, left without taking action. The party immediately went back into high gear. My friend then made the mistake of going into the yard, where one of his sons was po-

lately requesting partygoers not to block the driveway and warning them that if they parked too close to the intersection, their cars might get hit. On an apparently pre-arranged signal delivered by cell phone, the preacher—a large man in his 40's—and perhaps five young men came charging across the street, screaming obscenities, insults, and threats. The preacher led the gang, saying ridiculous things about my friend's long-dead mother, trying to provoke him—rather an old and feeble scholar—into swinging, which would then justify the beating they were threatening. Failing in their initial objective, the youths attacked his son and two young men who were with him. When the police finally responded to the 911 call, the two black officers in charge decided to arrest my friend's son, because in fighting off the attack, he hit one of them with a small glass, which he had been holding in his hand. As they put him in the squad car, the crowd across the street broke out in a spontaneous chant, "Obama! Obama!"

No arrest was made because, as my friend pointed out to the police, the first punch was thrown on his property by one of the black youths who was positively identified. "Charge both or charge none," he told them. The police left, and once again the party roared back to life until at 2 A.M. they returned, forced people to leave, and issued a citation. The next day the preacher tried to stir up more trouble by telling the police that my friend and his son had scattered watermelon rinds and chicken bones in his yard—obviously a racial provocation. Unfortunately, the police also noted that there were rinds and bones in my friend's yard, the obvious detritus of the preacher's own party. They shook their heads. My friend is a conservative who was so disgusted with McCain that he was tempted to vote for Barack Obama. I think he knows better now.

The Obamanation we are facing is a racist nation that will leave few honorable options for members of the coming American minority. They can, of course, emigrate, an option that gets more attractive every day. If they stay, they will have to resist the temptation to turn liberal and become signatories to the suicide pact. If they refuse to sell out, all too many will lose their souls in a poisonous racial hatred that may drag them down as low as Barack Obama and Jeremiah Wright. In resisting the campaign to "make white people illegal," as every sensible person of any color should, decent Americans should not make the mistake of blaming black people for the suicide we continue to inflict on ourselves. We white males are the problem, not blacks, women, homosexuals, or Mexicans. We—at least the liberal part of "we"—turned away from our religion and our civilization; we made war on property and marriage; we rejected Haydn and Sophocles in favor of John Cage and Kate Chopin. We have emasculated ourselves, pithed our brains, destroyed our vision and hearing, and now all that is left is to vote for a candidate whose rhetoric at least is telling us to fling our worthless carcasses off the cliff. It is almost enough to make an otherwise sane American vote for John McCain.



Fastest Jewish Gun in the West

Frank Gallop's 1966 spoof recording, "The Ballad of Irving," left most people laughing heartily. ("He came from the old Bar Mitzvah spread, / With a 10-gallon yarmulke on his head. / He always followed his mother's wishes. / Even on the range he used two sets of dishes.") What nearly no one knew then and few know now is that there was a real Jewish gunfighter in the Old West, and he ranked considerably higher than the "142nd fastest." In researching the Old West over many years I often came upon Jewish merchants, which was no surprise. There was the shopkeeper and tailor Jacob Davis of Virginia City, who fashioned the blue-denim work pants with copper rivets that Levi Strauss of San Francisco marketed; the tobacconist Adolph Sutro, who built a stamp mill and then dug a tunnel through Mt. Davidson to haul ore from the mines of Virginia City; the peddler Michael Goldwasser, who arrived in Arizona with next to nothing and laid the foundation for what would become the Goldwater chain of department stores; and many others of similar business acumen. There was also Jim Levy, who traded only in bullets.

Levy began life not in a ghetto in Eastern Europe but in Dublin, Ireland. In 1850, at the age of eight, he immigrated with his parents to the United States. He would spend the next ten years in New York before heading west to the mining camps of California. Levy was not a good Jewish boy. He behaved more like his Irish buddies, drinking, gambling, fighting, and facing death with cool indifference. He became the only known Jewish gunfighter in the Old West.

Lured by the silver strikes, Levy crossed the Sierras to Nevada and the mining camp of Pioche. The "chief" of Pioche was Morgan Courtney, a fearless gunfighter and, like Levy, an immigrant from Ireland. Although two years older than Courtney, Levy looked upon the Kerryman Court-

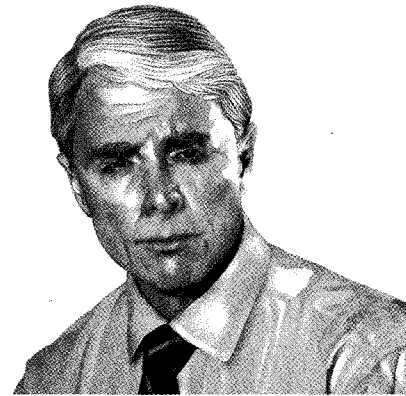
ney as a hero to be emulated. By the time Levy met Courtney, the Kerryman had already killed four men in gunfights. He would kill two more before he himself was shot to death.

Levy's first deadly confrontation occurred in 1871 and involved feared shootist Mike Casey, who had earlier mortally wounded wealthy Pioche businessman Tom Gorson in a gunfight. As Gorson lay dying he bequeathed all his holdings to his friends and \$5,000 to the man who avenged his death by killing Casey. Hoping to bait Casey into a fight, Levy went about Pioche's saloons declaring that Casey had gunned down Gorson "without giving him a show." Casey soon caught up with Levy in a saloon and called on him to draw. Levy protested that he was unarmed but said, "I will go and fix myself and when I come back I will come back fighting."

Levy later found Casey standing on the sidewalk talking with a friend, Dave Neagle. Yelling "Casey, you son-of-a-bitch, I'm here!" Levy closed on Casey and fired at near point-blank range. The bullet hit Casey in the head. Levy fired again and a second round hit Casey in the neck. Levy then turned his weapon on Neagle, but the latter had drawn his own revolver and fired a round that struck Levy in the jaw. By then a sheriff's deputy was on the scene to put a halt to the gunplay.

Casey died from his wounds, but Levy recovered, although he was left with a sinister-looking scar. He got the \$5,000 and also was released from any criminal prosecution when a preliminary hearing determined that he had told Casey that he would be coming after him—fair warning in the Old West.

Levy notched his second kill a little more than a year later when he shot Tom Ryan in a dispute over a Pioche mining claim. Then, 1876 found Levy in Deadwood, and the next year in Cheyenne. It was in the Wyoming



town that Levy was involved in his most famous gunfight. After losing a high-stakes hand at the poker table, Levy declared he had been cheated. Renowned gunfighter Charley Harrison, who raked in the pot, loudly declared that the Irish were always poor losers.

Levy leaped to his feet and drew his revolver. Harrison spread his hands, saying that he was unarmed but would get himself healed and meet Levy in the street. Excited saloon patrons began placing bets. Harrison was a heavy favorite. Within minutes Levy and Harrison were facing each other in front of Frenchy's saloon on Eddy Street. Harrison's draw was lightning quick, but his first shot missed. Levy's struck Harrison in the chest, and he fell to the snow-covered street, firing another round on his way down. Levy ran to Harrison and fired another bullet into the prostrate gunfighter. Harrison hung on for two weeks before dying.

Levy spent the late 1870's in Leadville but was in Tombstone by 1880. With partners Dick Clark, Wyatt Earp, and Doc Holliday he staked three water claims, which in that arid region could rival veins of ore in value. Levy did not figure in any of Tombstone's many gunfights but would make news on a visit to nearby Tucson in 1882. A dispute in a faro game led Levy to exclaim that he would shoot the eyes out of dealer John Murphy. Fair warning. A short while later when Levy emerged from the Palace Hotel, Murphy, gun in hand, was standing in the street waiting for him. Levy never knew what hit him. The fastest Jewish gun in the West was 40 years old. <C>

The Obama Presidency

The Triumph of (Lots of) Experience Over (a Little) Hope?

by Doug Bandow

It has been an awful two decades. Say what you will about Ronald Reagan, he did not leave people feeling depressed, even hopeless. Then came four years of George H.W. Bush—an honorable man, but hardly an inspiration. And his tax and regulatory policies were largely indistinguishable from those of the Democrats.

Then we endured eight years of the Clintons. Bill was embarrassing enough, devoting perhaps too much attention to the White House intern program. This freed Hillary to spend her time attempting to socialize the medical system and punish the Clintons' enemies. Given his nonsensical interventions and wars (Somalia, Haiti, Kosovo) and the mere presence of the atrocious Secretary of State Madeleine Albright, January 20, 2001, could not come quickly enough.

That was before President George W. Bush and his neo-conservative Greek chorus took us on a glorious crusade to Mesopotamia while letting Osama bin Laden get away; before the President centralized control over education and created a vast new welfare program, the Medicare drug benefit; before the White House baptized the elections in Palestine that brought Hamas to power; before the President followed Louis XIV in declaring "*L'État, c'est moi*," claiming the right to declare an American arrested in America an "enemy combatant" beyond the reach of the Constitution; and before the President and his Republican friends in Congress increased domestic spending as fast as Lyndon Johnson did.

After almost eight years of George W. Bush, who in America doesn't hope for "change"?

Almost anyone, other than the crazy warmonger from Arizona, would offer a positive contrast to President Bush just by voicing a couple of coherent sentences. But how likely is Barack Obama to put real flesh on the promise of change and hope? Alas, the passion and eloquence with which he speaks do not make up for the absence of substance. Change from a mixed economy could just as likely mean socialism as capitalism. Change from crazed neoconservative interventionism overseas could as easily mean loopy liberal interventionism as conservative non-interventionism.

Still, a glimmer of hope remains—but only a glimmer.

Doug Bandow is a former special assistant to President Ronald Reagan and the author of Foreign Follies: America's New Global Empire (Xulon Press).

Obama is no dummy. Of course, many smart presidents have done lots of dumb things. Intelligence is no bar to ideological inanity. Still, consider Bill Clinton. He did not like having to care what the financial markets thought of his economic policies, but he moderated the Democratic Party's worst excesses to avoid ruining America's financial reputation. That is more than we can say for George W. Bush and his "permanent Republican majority," who together turned a budget surplus into a growing deficit.

Obama taught at the University of Chicago Law School. Granted, mere proximity to "Law and Economics" professors does not guarantee anything. But at least through osmosis he should have assimilated some rational thoughts about economics and policy. How could anyone attend the university home of Milton Friedman and not gain at least a passing appreciation for the free market?

Occasional glimpses of rational policy have peeked out from beneath the blizzard of stupid campaign promises designed to win the Democratic Party nomination. There have been hints that Obama understands the value of educational choice and genuine Social Security reform. As an Illinois state senator, he was one of the few Democrats to voice opposition to the Iraq invasion. He has offered occasional criticisms of the Bush administration's war on civil liberties in the name of fighting terrorism.

And, yes, there is that basic assumption: How on earth could it get any worse? As Joe Biden reminded us, Barack Obama takes a shower, dresses well, and sounds good when he speaks. What more is needed to improve upon the present situation?

As George W. Bush so dramatically taught us, it is very dangerous to assume that things could not get worse. And there are many reasons to think that they might. First, there is the overarching hubris, the apparently sincere belief of Obama and many of his followers that he really is different from any other candidate ever to appear on an American ballot, and that he has been uniquely anointed to transform the United States. Lots of politicians have spouted lots of nonsense over the years, but Obama's rhetoric is more silly than most.

There is also the informal, unofficial Obama campaign. He came to represent the fondest hopes and dreams of the left. That is not all bad—for the most part, the left wants us out of Iraq and denies that the executive branch has the power to imprison and torture people at will. But

the left remains the left, which means big government, massive social programs, political correctness, socialized medicine and education, and more. Obama has occasionally made dissenting noises—declaring, for instance, that affirmative action should be based on class, not race. And he has sometimes double-crossed his backers, pulling back from advocating a swift withdrawal from Iraq and conceding the Bush administration's unlawful FISA surveillance program. But his heresies almost always yield bigger, more intrusive, less lawful government.

And there is Obama's background as a community organizer. How many community organizers really favor community over government? Many genuinely do not like public bureaucracies, but most want to seize government power, not dismantle it. And while hanging out at the University of Chicago, that bastion of libertarian thought, Obama never took the slightest step to suggest sympathy with that tradition. For an ambitious black law professor, how better to get some attention than to unveil some previously hidden right-leaning beliefs? He was either playing a very deep game—acting the lefty to win the presidency—or he has no right-leaning beliefs to flaunt.

There is his record as a state and federal legislator. The main thing we know about his Illinois service is that he worked very hard to ensure that every abortion yielded a dead baby. As for his federal time, his voting records tell us that he is the most liberal member of the Senate, though his supporters contend that this ranking unfairly reflects a number of missed votes. Even if that is true, there is no evidence to suggest that those votes would have moved him to the right of the Democratic caucus. Given the opportunity to turn his rhetoric into reality by building bipartisan coalitions and looking for unconventional solutions, he chose to stay in the liberal hive.

There also are his positions on the campaign trail. One must look long and hard to find anything that strays from statist orthodoxy. Of course, he may not believe his own rhetoric. Who really thinks that John McCain was on the road to Damascus when he recognized the importance of giving taxpayers back their money and of drilling for oil on the Outer Continental Shelf? Politicians rarely have qualms about tossing their old, unpopular positions overboard to get elected president. Obama and McCain almost certainly are the same in this regard.

Might Obama be willing to disregard his strong backing from the teachers' unions to defend the role of parents and local communities? Might Obama tell the social-welfare lobbyists who have rendered so much help that he has decided that only private accounts can save Social Security? I won't hold my breath. Those who are cowards when running for office rarely become heroes when holding office. And without making the case for this sort of real change during his campaign, he would lack any electoral mandate to advance such programs.

Even on foreign policy there is little reason to hope for much improvement. There would be no more Iraqs,

perhaps, but Obama spoke at AIPAC and genuflected before the assembled worthies over the dire global threat posed by Iran's nonexistent nuclear weapons. His response to Russia's retaliation against Georgia for invading South Ossetia was McCain-lite: We have to do something, and that includes bringing Tbilisi into NATO, but we just should not be so mean to Moscow. There is not one issue—stealing Kosovo from Serbia, protecting South Korea from North Korea, dumping more foreign aid on more foreign countries—on which he differs from liberal interventionist orthodoxy. And his 300-plus foreign-policy advisors reek of discredited Clintonistas, humanitarian interventionists, and Democratic Party apparatchiks. On balance, I would prefer their foreign policy to a strategy concocted by the überneocons for crazy John McCain, but that is not much of a choice.

The main thing we know about Obama's Illinois service is that he worked very hard to ensure that every abortion yielded a dead baby. As for his federal time, his voting records tell us that he is the most liberal member of the Senate, though his supporters contend that this ranking unfairly reflects a number of missed votes. Yet there is no evidence to suggest that those votes would have moved him to the right of the Democratic caucus. Given the opportunity to turn his rhetoric into reality by building bipartisan coalitions and looking for unconventional solutions, he chose to stay in the liberal hive.

We have an awful lot of awful experience with politicians like Obama, and all of it offers a pessimistic vision for the future. Yes, a very small glint of hope remains. Maybe Obama is the true Manchurian Candidate, a dedicated free-market, limited-government, libertarian/paleo-conservative who decided to infiltrate the liberal movement and seize control of the Democratic Party. Is that any more farfetched than the theory that George W. Bush was actually a liberal plant intended to wreck conservatism and the Republican Party?

There is still a case to be made for Obama. Bob Barr is not likely to win, and John McCain is likely to expand government power almost as far and fast as Obama would, while triggering one or more wars. But unfortunately, Obama almost certainly is what he appears to be: a liberal internationalist, interventionist, and redistributionist. Any case to be made for him is purely negative.

Can the republic survive an Obama presidency? Actually, the republic has been dead and buried for a long time. But the country likely will muddle along. If we can survive George W. Bush, we can survive anything. At least, I hope and pray we can. <C>

Boogaloo Down Broadway

The Charade of Liberal Change

by Tony Outhwaite

Here it is 2008, and everything else is old news. The provisional and absentee ballots, recounts, scores, and statistics of 2000-2007 are all in the history books, along with Afghan and Iraqi elections and constitutions, insurgencies, hurricanes, disgraced mayors and governors, and Supreme Court, lobbying, earmark, wiretapping, and energy and cartoon ruckuses. Since Barack Obama is talking “change,” everything else must be passé, right?

Wrong! In the Democratic Party and the foggy, insular world of paranoia that is today’s left, the boogaloo beat of the jungle tom-toms goes on night and day, just as Cole Porter predicted. Even now, in control of Congress but still intellectually and ethically bankrupt, lacking the sense God gave common garden varmints, and twitching with lunacy and hysteria, these Democratic Party animals are right up front about smashing up everything in sight in a frenzy of indignation and rage. Always dangerous to the country, they will never simply disappear; Barack Obama may preach the righteousness of change, but, to paraphrase military historian Ralph Peters, liberals—barely 20 percent of the electorate—will try to pass cowardice, stupidity, and spitefulness off as progress, virtue, and wisdom. Extol American penance to curry favor with foolish and resentful international elites, push through \$3.5 trillion in new spending and tax increases in the name of fairness, expand government intrusion into healthcare, do away with the Electoral College to reduce the vote to the liberal coasts, sponsor divisive race-based programs, deprive workers of secret-ballot protection in union votes—the same old liberal same old.

These upcoming attempts at disorder, presented as “change,” will instead be variations on shopworn reality-free, responsibility-free themes. The 2004 and 2006 elections merely illustrate the long-running spectacle of these unquiet souls trying to pass themselves off as centrists who reflect the true feelings of the country, rather than raffish malcontents and nutters with bad manners, bad attitudes, bad haircuts, and really terrible ideas about the Constitution, religion, history, economics, race, culture, the environment, and personal hygiene. Like fifth-rate vaudevillians auditioning for *American Idol*, they bring their tired gags and cheap parlor tricks with them—the overwrought metaphors and exaggerations, the slurs and character assassination, the conspiracy theories and bag-

gy-pants buffoonery—and make use of every type of fellow traveler they can find, but the basic repertoire barely changes at all. And we can’t count on Simon Cowell to harry them off-stage.

In the 2004 and 2006 campaigns we saw the standard offense of Democratic Party regulars backed by the always colorful Angry Left who, riled up and self-righteous, historically ignorant and anti-American as ever, actually wish death to those who don’t agree with them—the President, Charlton Heston, Jesse Helms, Justices Antonin Scalia and Clarence Thomas, Newt Gingrich, and the Pope included. Eager to appear up to date, they quickly replaced the late John Paul II in their Top Ten target list with Pope Benedict XVI, citing his brief compulsory membership in the Hitler Youth over 60 years ago as proof that he is Martin Bormann in a clerical collar. They haven’t yet come up with someone to slot in for the late Heston or Helms, but they will—this is their program, and they’re devoted to it.

High priests of intolerance strung out on the rancid pheromones of resentment and hatred, they rant against conservatives, the Founding Fathers, people of religious faith, the nuclear family, straight white males, Southerners, Republicans, anyone connected with law enforcement or the military, conventional marriage, patriotism, and of course the American public, who they always feel are too stupid to see things their way—and that’s the short list. Yet the American public figured out early on that the wiretapping of potential terrorist communiqués had not “chilled” free speech or “eroded” civil liberties, let alone “shredded” the Constitution, although they may have been puzzled by John Kerry’s threats to sue any bookstore carrying John O’Neill’s *Unfit for Command*. Those paying close attention may also raise an eyebrow at the likes of Carl Levin, Al Gore, Nancy Pelosi, Bill and Hillary Clinton, John Kerry, and Teddy the K, all in full blast over the alleged lies about Saddam Hussein’s WMD capabilities that they themselves warned about as far back as the mid-1990’s.

People like the Hillaryfolk, the Kerryfolk, the Teddyfolk, and the ACLU may go through the motions of urging compassion for their fellow world citizens, but their native extremism always surfaces, and they end up on the bandstand with corrupt, well-heeled megalomaniacs such as George Soros and slovenly demagogues like Michael Moore or trading quips with covens of hostile activist crazies such as the unmuzzled wolverines at *MoveOn*.

Tony Outhwaite is a literary agent in New York City.

org and the *Huffington Post*. Soros has styled himself the conscience of the world, but there's little indication that the world wants anything but his money. Just show us the bucks, Gyorgy, then get lost. Moore's *Fahrenheit 911* charmed the pseudosophisticates of the Hate America First contingent back in the day, but an array of legitimate journalists, pundits, and well-informed bloggers in drop-seat pajamas quickly ran off an annotated list of dozens of trademark Moore distortions and outright falsehoods while the cinéaste noisily threatened to sue anyone who contradicted him. In 2004 Kerry boasted that many foreigners supported his candidacy, and today the media are queasy with anticipation that an Obama coronation will include legions of German and Serbian barmen, French swineherds, and Belgian fondue chefs to provide the multicultural glow so prized by American elites. Obama is already claiming that America needs to be "rehabilitated" in the eyes of the world of nuance and seems to think that if only he, his resentful wife, and such great brains as Steven Spielberg go out to schmooze Ahmadinejad, Kim Jong Il, Chavez, and the grifters at the United Nations, all will be well with the planet again. Such righteous indignation, which Marshall McLuhan once called a "standard strategy for endowing the idiot with dignity," is always important to liberals, so it is natural for them to quote from such smug media scribblers as Maureen Dowd, Gail Sheehy, and Frank Rich about how President Bush is stupid and dyslexic or that conservatives only care about corporate interests, and that our allies in Iraq are "puppets."

Another of their long-standing favorites is class warfare, an old chestnut that doesn't play well these days. When John Edwards went out on his "Two Americas" pep-rally tour during the 2004 campaign, the public, perhaps wise to the fact that the "tax cuts for the rich" helped most of them as well, were too smart to buy the corny routine. But that doesn't mean liberals have taken it out of the band book. And, as the Duke Ellington Orchestra has used "Take the 'A' Train" as its theme since 1941, the singing-donkey contingent always brings out the race card as one of their patented golden oldies, with Julian Bond, Jesse Jackson, and a retinue of seedy, paranoid grievancemonsters now denouncing Colin Powell, Condoleezza Rice, Michael Steele, Ward Connerly, and other black Republicans as "house slaves," "tame niggers," "black tyrants," and "traitors to their race." Bond has claimed that the Republican Party wants to see the Stars and Stripes and Nazi swastika hanging side by side, and Obama has hinted that the Republicans will somehow sandbag him with racial "code" words.

When nonsense like this backfires, liberals move quickly to the next logical step: In 2004 they lined up willing faux-intellectual nitwits from the "arts" community, provided them with a variety of carbonated beverages, and applauded wildly as they behaved like fools in public. Shrill, irrational, and childish, the artsters are always good for a laugh: the simpleminded Wallace Shawn whining about how "scary" Bush was; Arthur Miller recycling

his exhausted "return of McCarthyism" shtick; Norman Mailer and hydrophobic foreigners such as Harold Pinter and Margaret Drabble bemoaning the approach of fascism and doom. Next, as day follows night, they solicited the entertainment industry for fuddled has-beens like Jessica Lange and bratty vulgarities like Al Franken, Janeane Garofalo, and Whoopi Goldberg, with their quaint vocabularies, finely tuned knowledge of public affairs, and warnings that fascism and doom are even closer than we thought. They borrowed from asinine observations by such policy elites as Madeleine Albright, suspicious that Osama bin Laden had been nabbed at a Pink Floyd concert in Bratislava and was being held incommunicado in the visitors' locker room at Washington's RFK Stadium, to be brought out as an "October Surprise" the weekend before the election. This year Obama, with Albright as one of his backup singers, is already treating us to his observations on how Bin Laden, when caught, should be given the full benefits of our criminal-justice system like any common street felon.

Eight weeks from the 2004 election, the Democrats reached deep into the equipment bag, brought in special-guest attack-Rottweilers James Carville and Paul Begala to run with housebroken journalists Seymour Hersh, Kitty Kelley, and Paul Krugman, and docile talking heads Dan Rather, Peter Jennings, and Matt Lauer, and threw their trademark Hail Mary character-assassination bomb. That time around it was a zany but transparent play featuring forged documents and a litany of absurd charges about Bush's National Guard absenteeism and the First Lady's activities as a college drug kingpin. Once again, no success, and the haughty John Kerry switched to the paranoia offense, dropping hints about the President's "secret plans," devious though nonexistent plots to restore the military draft, gut Social Security and education spending, bankrupt farmers, perhaps confiscate the homes of minorities and use the proceeds to award free sports franchises to cronies. At the same time the senator referred grandly to his own plans for Iraq, healthcare, the economy, the rebuilding of alliances, and a hat he allegedly still had from years earlier. In Kerry's case the comments (except for the bit about the hat) were vague platitudes oddly similar to Obama's, better to be explained only after his own coronation as president through litigation—none of this general-election "count every vote" tedium for him; people might question those traditional waves of last-minute phantom Democrat voters, their numbers far exceeding available census and registration figures, popping up in urban centers such as St. Louis, Philadelphia, Seattle, Milwaukee, and Cleveland.

It isn't clear how Obama will claim that the United Nations is the obvious choice to heal the world, with billions missing through fraud and accounting scams and most of the governments now in place in Europe firmly in America's corner. France's Nicolas Sarkozy isn't likely to repeat former Prime Minister Jean-Pierre Raffarin's bizarre

comment that the Iraqi terrorist insurgents are France's "allies," and even the European Union is looking more soberly at the antics of Iran's mullahs. Yet the besotted media have already gushed about Obama's world-class intellect and speaking skills, as they did with Gore and Kerry, touting him as a direct descendant of Cicero with touches of Churchill, JFK, and even Bill Cosby thrown in. True, Obama isn't likely to turn up for a debate as Kerry did with his face tinted the color of a Syracuse Orangemen mascot, but we can expect the freshly manicured index finger pointed skyward in philosopher-prince attitude and mellifluous comments about "bringing the rest of the world in" on foreign-policy initiatives while bad-mouthing everyone else, including some four-dozen national allies already on board, as blunderers, amateurs, and dupes. Change? Not bloody likely: Bill Clinton tried this back in 1992, and it was already as stale as a marijuana brownie baked by Abbie Hoffman.

Obama is sure to prowl this year's battleground states of Florida, Iowa, Michigan, Ohio, Colorado, and Pennsylvania, sneering at the Bush tax cuts, playing the race card with gusto, and trying to present himself, cultural icon and owner of a million-dollar home thanks to his association with a convicted felon, as just a regular guy with a heart full of love for the simple man and a mission to get even with big business for everyone's benefit. The left loves to pin the donkey's tail of evil on entire industries, and this tactic will represent at least six of the ten tunes of Obama's first set, with broadsides against pharmaceuticals, finance companies, defense contractors, oil and gas companies, and any others who might get in the way of the left's soft Marxism of change.

When time begins running short during October, the liberal Democratic team will perpetrate a series of mad-cap incidents aimed at the voters whose common sense they always hold in such contempt. When paralyzed actor Christopher Reeve died in 2004, John Edwards made the preposterous assertion that if he and Kerry were elected the advances in stem-cell research would enable people like Reeve to "get up out of that wheelchair and walk again."

We cannot know if Michael Moore will once again troll the countryside trying to bribe voters with free noodles and underwear of undetermined origin, but liberal commentators and campaign advisors are sure to recommend that terrorists be treated as a mere "nuisance," like the hooker scandal that brought down New York Gov. Eliot Spitzer or scalpers in hooded sweatshirts out behind the Santa Fe Hippodrome hawking their tasteful selections of counterfeit Metallica tickets and leftover press passes to the 1975 Ali-Frazier "Thrilla in Manila." That approach worked like a bandit during the 1990's, didn't it?

Liberals enjoy trying to pass themselves off as sportsmen and almost always end up embarrassing themselves. During the 2004 campaign John Kerry appeared in a series of snappy dirt-biking and windsurfing outfits, and finally in a camouflage goose-hunting getup that might yet rank

as a classic, an image as eternally embarrassing as Michael Dukakis in a tanker's helmet or Jimmy Carter, delirious in the heat, staggering along Massachusetts Avenue in jogging shorts. Obama has already pretended to bowl in a white Oxford dress shirt and tie, and who knows what other pranks he has up his sleeve for the ESPN saloon audience. Elk hunting? Dominoes with the oldsters? Donatella Versace has dedicated her new line to Obama, so we might see what the left of tomorrow, with its enthusiasm for bogus change but limited fashion sense, will be wearing for sporty occasions, win, lose, or draw. Here is Obama in loungewear at the Brandenburg Gate; here is Obama toggled out in soccerwear at the Tehran soccer stadium; here is Obama in winterwear counseling the caribou in the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge.

Remember the 2004 campaign's final days, as Democratic Party hustlers fanned out across the country in their customary last-minute drive to register every illegal immigrant, crackhead, fourth grader, and Dutch Decoy Spaniel they could find, many of them more than once, as part of their "Steal Every Vote" series of plays? Once again their lawyers will set up camp in battleground states, hoping to litigate another attempted election-snatch as other handlers look, panic-stricken, up and down their own sideline for anyone who might invent a last-second scandal, design a trick play—anything to wrest the game outright as the clock runs down. Four years ago, even a pre-Halloween taped appearance by Osama bin Laden himself, still sore about Israel's 1982 invasion of Lebanon, failed to sway the American electorate.

"The Book of Wrath," a long-forbidden 12th-century pamphlet composed by disgruntled Benedictine monks at the Austrian abbey of Melk, contains a maxim suggesting that "a dog howls only when wet unless he's cranky to begin with." After eight years in the wilderness, the Democratic Party and their Angry Left supporters are very, very cranky. The four more years granted the Bush administration in 2004 were quickly transposed into a long Howard Dean-inspired howl of recrimination programmed to last for a decade at the very least. The neurotics of the intellectual community will continue their gyrations of contrived hysteria that the election of Republicans will mean, as one obscure novelist put it four years ago, "the end of life as we know it"—state of emergency, loss of their freedom of speech, denial of foundation grants to fund their frivolous projects—the sore loser's dark night of paranoia. Actor Martin Sheen, who thinks he's president and had a TV show to prove it, is perpetually beside himself. Art critic Simon Schama, novelist Jane Smiley, historian Garry Wills, literary critic James Atlas, and troubadours Maggie Gyllenhaal and Richard Dreyfuss, all nearly homicidal with rage, have been a few of those weighing in with delusional prophecies about the coming secession of blue states and civil war, blacklisting, roundups of Jews, and imposition of martial law and a bluenose theocracy. Thanks for reviving memories of Kristallnacht for

everyone's benefit, but when word begins leaking out that some Democratic insiders and show-biz and literary folk are now voting Republican, the fur will really fly. Even now there may be a call in to Randy Newman to produce the catchy new tune "Short Losers."

People like this, trapped in their fantasy world of self-righteousness, will pride themselves on continuing to "fight," of course. But they are the intellectual equivalent of Don Rickles' joke that the cobra is actually a garter snake with dewlaps. These are the posturers who, euphoric after private audiences with Fidel Castro, praised his wisdom and humanity, and who for years pretended that Yasser Arafat was a whirling dervish of good intentions. In their hatred of America they go through the motions of lamenting the nation's alleged international isolation while secretly reveling in it. With their utopian fools' paradise of enforced quotas and diversity, speech codes, unrestricted immigration, and intellectual elitism now under attack, they will turn their energies into a soothing, therapeutic program of rage directed at their growing list of designated bogeymen.

Unfortunately for them, it will never be enough. Mocha lattes clutched in grimy paws, quoting Obama's empty clichés about economics, Iran, and Iraq, they will hyperventilate against American prominence, the Boy Scouts, anything resembling a Christmas ornament, drilling for oil, smoking, drinking, driving, logging, homeschooling, spelling bees, beauty pageants, ROTC, sports teams with American Indian nicknames, pet turtles, dodgeball, beef and pork, prunes—the constipated self-indulgence of a hundred fashionable pet peeves, many identical to those offensive to Muslims. Pretensions to the moral high ground reduced to ashes decades ago, the left will still search for inventive new ways to denounce conservatives as fascist squares and xenophobes and demand that U.N. functionaries—wizards in the disciplines of sexual racketeering and financial scams but clueless about genuine crises in Zimbabwe, the Sudan, Iran, Georgia, and Burma—be appointed to run the world.

For today's faux intellectuals, anything they dislike is a conspiracy, a trick, a racket. So as the economy improves they will denounce the rich; if it falters, they will blame conservatives. Most fun of all, everything will be everyone else's fault. They will agitate for repeal of the Electoral College, praise Justice Ruth Bader Ginsburg's enthusiasm for using other countries' laws in our own court cases, call again for U.N. monitoring of our elections. They will predict disaster in North Korea or Iran or the Middle East, and if things go sour they will do a lock-step version of the Bavarian dirndl dance of delight. They will blame the Islamic attacks, bombings, and riots in New York, London, Madrid, Paris, Bali, Copenhagen, and elsewhere on poverty and other "root causes," and as the European Union unravels, led by the Irish, Czechs, Poles, and Dutch, they will claim to be appalled at the backwardness and ungratefulness of the European public. Desperate for another

"inaccurate-but-still-true" story after the Koran-in-the-commode and other scoops wound up in the commode where they belonged, *Newsweek*, the *New York Times*, the *New Yorker*, and others will go undercover to report on abuses in Harvard University's brand-new diversity drive, claiming underrepresentation of hermaphroditic Samoan ventriloquism majors on campus.

The "Dissent is Patriotic" buttons are mostly gone now, replaced on the lapels of the self-anointed by other badges of trendy exhibitionism such as the "We are the Ones We Need" or "Change We Can Believe In" pins worn by cocooned professors and clueless 18-year-old kooks with adhesive tape on their eyeglasses. But for Obama there will always be acolytes in media and academic madrassas locked in to the elitist group-think attitude that the public is too bitter and intellectually backward to be trusted with rational decisions. In 2004 John Kerry tried to pass himself off as a public-policy intellectual, pandering to such vindictive leftist neurotics as Ralph Neas of People for the American Way, Nan Aron of the Alliance for Justice, and Barry Lynn of Americans United for Separation of Church and State, delivering meandering, contradictory statements on abortion, foreign policy, and his youthful nighttime sorties along the rivers of Cambodia, across the Khyber Pass, and into the cerveza joints of New York's South Bronx. This year Hillary Clinton, still jumpy after her near escape from snipers in Bosnia, was forced to pass the grubby baton of change along to Obama to do the grip-and-grovel routine in front of preening international fools and frauds desperate to appear relevant. It isn't yet known if George Soros will shovel \$30 million his way, and Diddy and Snoop Dogg have been distracted by assault indictments, but others will hand over their dollars for the change that isn't change.

So the Angry Left's boogaloo beat will go on, a cacophony of played-out repertoire, wrong notes, and flagging rhythm, with the Clintons, Kerry, Warren Christopher, Joe Biden, and other failed notables scrambling for featured guest solo opportunities.

Leftist weirdness. Intellectual pretentiousness and pettifoggery. Feel-good progressive drivel. Stupidity. Intolerance. Abuse. Slander. Race-baiting and demagoguery. Threats of secession. Delusion. Hysteria. Paranoia. Madness. Free Mumia, and Khalid Sheikh Mohammed, Al Gore, and the polar bears, too, while we're at it. Great stuff, no? Look for it all on radio and TV and at upcoming concert and theatrical performances, academic conferences, protest marches, neighborhood block parties, and stadium appearances. No lifeguard on duty and, if they get their way, no photo ID needed. Change doesn't get any better than this. Let every vote count and all that. The left may think that all the rest of us are the biggest fools, to paraphrase singer Arthur Prysock, and that their faux change is wondrous, but if Susan Sarandon, George Clooney, and Noam Chomsky take their carbon footprints abroad in protest, so much the better. Now there's change we can believe in. ◇

The Revelations of the Obama Plan

Change We Can't Afford

by David A. Hartman

The Democratic nominee for president has finally offered the details of his campaign theme—that he will radically change America if elected—by posting on his website “The Blueprint for Change: Barack Obama’s Plan for America.” Senator Obama’s call for “change” has mesmerized America’s youth and raised unprecedented grassroots donations. Every American longing for real change that will address the serious problems our republic faces should look carefully at his plan.

The most evident goal of the Obama Plan is a bold expansion of the welfare state, driven by comprehensive national healthcare, untouchable Social Security, and measures to reduce poverty. The universal healthcare component “will provide affordable quality healthcare coverage for every American.” Obama’s healthcare policies will be comparable in cost and coverage to those of government employees, and subsidies will enable those not eligible for Medicaid or State Children’s Health Insurance (SCHIP) to afford income-adjusted premiums, while the costs of consistent quality policies will be reduced \$2,500 per year by “health information technology.” Why should we believe that a socialist program that aims at equality of price and provision will resolve the healthcare dilemma? What will keep it from becoming a rationed healthcare system like those of Canada and Europe, which are highly inefficient and burdensome on taxpayers? How would Obama’s plan compare with alternative plans based on responsible consumers and competitive providers, such as universal (even public-assisted, if necessary) health savings accounts (HSAs) that are backed by high-deductible health plans (HDHPs), with government as the reinsurer of last resort? Or policies that offer a range of premiums that reward healthy lifestyles and seek to curtail obesity, indolence, and stimulant abuse? Or legislation that offers equal tax treatment to both individual and group policies? Or regulations that require local competitive markets to publish the prices of pharmaceuticals, diagnostics, and medical treatments, and limit price variations based on cost?

Under the Obama Plan, Social Security retirement benefits for indigent seniors would pile additional burdens on a shrinking workforce and increase both the number of retirees and the longevity of retirement. This, in turn, would reduce the overall number of marriages and lower

birthrates for workers. Fear not, because

Obama will protect Social Security benefits for current and future beneficiaries alike. And he does not believe it is necessary or fair to hard working seniors to raise the retirement age. Obama is strongly opposed to privatizing Social Security.

Obama believes that the first place to look for ways to strengthen Social Security is the payroll tax system. Currently, the Social Security payroll tax applies to only the first \$97,500 a worker makes. Obama supports increasing the maximum amount of earnings covered by Social Security . . .

Social Security payroll taxes were first collected in 1937 at a combined worker and employer tax rate of two percent. Monthly retirement benefits, which were first paid in 1940, began at age 65, which was near the life expectancy. Today, life expectancy at birth in the United States is 78 years; the full retirement age for Social Security is now 66 (67 in 2027); and FICA rates total 15.3 percent on the first \$102,000 of earned income (up 4.6 percent from the 2007 cutoff of \$97,500). The Medicare portion of this tax (1.45 percent) applies to unlimited earned income. If Obama means what he says about protecting Social Security benefits, then Social Security rates will also have to be applied to *unlimited* earned income (something Obama is, in fact, considering). This alone demonstrates that Social Security has become a welfare Ponzi scheme rather than a stable trust fund containing workers’ pensions. Why would any responsible worker not prefer his own personal retirement account over a political farce that is repeatedly on the brink of insolvency?

As if expanded healthcare and Social Security spending would not be enough of a burden for taxpayers, a wish list of additional giveaways and subsidies intended for poor and middle-income Americans is seeded throughout the Obama Plan. Those below the poverty level would be offered “green jobs” (a modern Works Project Administration?) and an expanded Earned Income Tax Credit, which already allows for income-tax refunds that exceed taxes paid—including FICA taxes. Other subsidies include a thousand-dollar tax reduction for middle-income taxpayers; \$500 home-mortgage credits; rural pork, including nationwide broadband internet access; illegal-immigration amnesty (a welfare black hole); a \$4,000 per year American Opportunity Tax Credit for college students

David A. Hartman, a retired banker, is chairman of the board of directors of The Rockford Institute.

who log 100 hours of public service; and “investments” in low-cost housing and community not-for-profit agencies.

While the Obama Plan opens with proposals to “change Washington” by putting an end to self-serving lobbying, secrecy, and wasteful spending, his proposals would result in incredible additional spending for welfare transfers, which ultimately benefit self-serving politicians. The Great Society of the 1960’s proved that the handouts and subsidies of the welfare state lead only to stagnation. As a consequence, we are witnessing the relentless growth of welfare transfers of income; according to President Bush’s 2009 budget, such transfers amount to \$2 trillion out of the \$3.1 trillion to be spent by the federal government.

In his plan, Obama tells us, “I don’t want to send another generation of American children to failing schools.” To change the situation, he would “recruit, prepare, retain and reward teachers.” To accomplish these goals, he would spend more taxpayer dollars (Teacher Service Scholarships, federally funded mentoring programs, and residency programs). Obama’s plan also “makes math and science a national priority” by recruiting the necessary talents, but it makes no mention of implementing competitive pay according to the teacher’s performance in the classroom, rather than seniority. It calls for us to “address the dropout crisis,” but it does not mention that in low-income neighborhoods crime and drugs often prevent schools from functioning properly, while work-study and technical tracks are needed for those who are not headed for college. Obama wants to “support English Language Learners” by employing ineffective “transitional bilingual” instruction. Finally, teachers’ unions often stand in the way of more accurate assessments of teacher performance, appropriate compensation, and student discipline. The Obama Plan does not address any of this. Admittedly, his proposals for early-child, afternoon, and summer supplementary education are worth addressing, given the number of families with two parents working. Nowhere does the plan admit that increases in spending do not automatically translate into increases in performance. In fact, the American Opportunity Tax Credit, which would provide \$4,000 toward each student’s college education, would result in tuition inflation. What we really need is government-mandated transparency; standard expense reports should reveal each school’s overhead and the number of paid personnel per student, allowing trustees to identify the necessary reforms.

The economy in general, and energy in particular, get substantial attention in the Obama Plan. He proposes to double the federal investment in the research and development of “green technology,” clean energy, biofuels, and more fuel-efficient motor vehicles. But nowhere does the plan address the possibility of opening coastal, Rocky Mountain, and Alaskan reserves during the transition to renewable sources of energy, in order to stop the runaway cost of foreign fuels. Obama proposes to strengthen labor unions by promoting the “Freedom to Unionize” and

promises to “Protect Striking Workers.” Any businessman who has dealt with unions knows that they already have more than enough power.

Contrary to the theorems of supply-siders, his proposal to increase the minimum wage and index it thereafter to rise with inflation is necessary to increase incentives for employment. A “living wage” of ten dollars per hour for full-time workers would be an effective incentive to work instead of relying on welfare. On the other hand, Obama’s concern for boosting middle-class incomes is at odds with his proposed amnesty for illegal immigrants. Those illegal aliens who stand to benefit from such an amnesty, and who have been a major cause of depressed wages and salaries, will bring yet another invasion of relatives to depress incomes further. Obama’s “Fight for Fair Trade” represents an area that has been neglected by Washington, allowing for the depression of both white- and blue-collar workers’ incomes. But the Obama Plan fails to address why the United States can no longer compete in world trade, the chief reason incomes are falling.

That Obama’s plan devotes only two out of sixty-five pages to “Restoring Fiscal Discipline” is significant. To accomplish this, “Obama will reinstate pay-as-you-go (PAYGO) budget rules, so that new spending or tax cuts are paid for by spending cuts or new revenue elsewhere.” The federal deficit is over \$300 billion and rising, and that, of course, does not take into account the huge spending increases required by the Obama Plan. He proposes (without being specific) to cut “pork barrel spending” while calling for a smorgasbord of welfare giveaways, presumably to be paid for with his repeal of the Bush tax cuts for the wealthy.

The plan hardly scratches the surface of the meltdown of Wall Street and the financial markets; Obama’s proposals only address the subprime mortgage crisis, loan disclosure, and credit-card practices. The United States has not yet paid off the federal debts incurred in the late 80’s and early 90’s from the meltdown of the savings and loans that spread to the commercial banks. Washington failed to learn any lessons from this disaster. Instead, at the urging of the Wall Street barons, Congress repealed the Glass-Steagall Act of 1933 and replaced it with the Omnibus Financial Institution Reform Acts of 1999, which removed from the Federal Reserve Bank the power to keep commercial banks, investment underwriters, and insurance companies separate and did not make the Fed responsible for regulating the risks, transparency, and solvency of the worldwide financial conglomerates that emerged as a result of this legislation. Thus, investment bankers, with

their hedge funds, and banks, with their "SIVs" (structured investment vehicles), have collaborated in highly leveraged buyouts and collateralized debt obligations that have taken excessive risks. Supposedly, these risks would be offset by "derivatives," but they failed to prevent yet another meltdown. The restoration of the Glass-Steagall Act, and appropriate regulation of financial institutions, are of paramount importance.

The Obama Plan is not a blueprint for the kind of change that America needs. It is radical in its pursuit of a leftist social agenda that would transfer income from the most productive to a large enough portion of the electorate to buy the office of the presidency. But the perverse incentives and effects of such a plan have already been clearly demonstrated by the failed New Deal, which drove recession to depression, and the Great Society, which caused stagflation and aided in the demise of families. What Americans need is a leader who is radical enough to get to the very root of our dilemmas, visualize the necessary solutions, and effect real and lasting change.

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forcing him to pay half of his return on an investment to the government.

Many of the issues identified in the Obama Plan, particularly involving fiscal affairs, are left unanswered. Problems associated with foreign trade and the movement overseas of the manufacturing sector are barely mentioned, with no emphasis on solving them. Yet the trade deficit has accumulated a three-trillion dollar debt over the past four years alone. This deficit has been mirrored by decreased saving for investment, which has required massive borrowing abroad. Since chronic trade deficits began in the manufacturing sector in 1982, manufacturing has decreased to less than half of its previous share of GDP, and manufacturing jobs have declined by half as well. The inability of U.S. manufacturers to compete lies not in a lack of innovation or productivity: In these, the United States still leads the world. It is because of the value-added taxes (VATs) adopted by all our competitors, ranging from 15 to 25 percent *ad valorem*. VATs are rebated to foreign producers when they export their products, and no comparable tax is applied to those products when they are imported to the United States. These VATs are levied on U.S. exports to foreign markets, but our government offers no offsetting rebates on those exports. The result is a 15- to 25-percent price disadvantage in domestic and foreign markets on goods and services. At the same time, our competitors are gradually reducing corporate-income taxes and allowing capital expenditures to be tax expensed immediately.

The United States desperately needs tax reform that includes a competitive border-adjusted VAT to replace corporate-income taxes. Devaluing the dollar has not worked, because it inflates commodities and other costs and offers U.S. real estate, factories, and securities for sale at bargain-basement prices. Devaluation will reduce Americans to serfs under foreign landlords. The very process of devaluing the dollar through low interest rates that do not even offset inflation and devaluation results in inadequate savings to restore and update the manufacturing sector, as well as to supplement retirement income for the prudent. If we are serious about regenerating a prosperous and growing middle class and shrinking the ranks of the poor, then we need both reduced federal government spending and tax reform.

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Obama on Foreign Policy

A Mysterious Work in Progress

by Ted Galen Carpenter

The central theme of Sen. Barack Obama's campaign for the presidency has been his call for "change"—albeit often with few details about the nature of that change. There is certainly a pressing need for change in U.S. foreign policy. During the Cold War, Washington's strategy led to security free-riding by allies and clients, caused the republic to blunder into ill-advised military crusades, and laid an unnecessary, chronic financial burden on taxpayers.

Matters have become even worse since the end of the Cold War. U.S. presidents have ordered ten major military missions in the past 19 years, intervening in places as diverse as Panama, Somalia, Haiti, the Balkans, and the Persian Gulf. Washington's security commitments have expanded enormously; America is now under treaty obligation to help defend such tiny clients as the Baltic republics, Slovakia, and Slovenia in addition to the obligations undertaken to various allies during the Cold War. America's strategic overextension and muddled priorities have reached new levels under George W. Bush, with Washington's expensive and bloody folly in Iraq and the administration's utopian goal of implanting democracy in the Middle East and other unpromising regions.

Our foreign policy fairly cries out for drastic change, but it remains uncertain whether Obama would bring the right kind of change. Many of his positions are sketchy, and in those cases where he has provided significant detail, there are as many reasons for uneasiness about his approach as there are for hope.

To his credit, Obama was an early opponent of the Bush administration's invasion of Iraq, at a time when it was not popular to take that position. In an October 2007 speech at DePaul University, he described the political climate that those of us who opposed the lemming-like surge to war remember all too well:

Five years ago today, I was asked to speak at a rally against going to war in Iraq. The vote to authorize the war in Congress was less than ten days away, and I was a candidate for the United States Senate. Some friends of mine advised me to keep quiet. Go-

ing to war in Iraq, they pointed out, was popular. All of the other candidates were supporting the war at the time. If the war goes well, they said, you'll have thrown your political career away.

But I didn't see how Saddam Hussein posed an imminent threat. I was convinced that a war would distract us from Afghanistan and the real threat from al Qaeda. I was worried that Iraq's history of sectarian rivalry could leave us bogged down in a bloody conflict. And I believed the war would fan the flames of extremism and lead to new terrorism. So I went to the rally and argued against a "rash war"—a "war based not on reason, but on politics"—"an occupation of undetermined length, with undetermined costs, and undetermined consequences."

That kind of courage and judgment warrants admiration. Likewise, during the 2008 primary, Obama's blunt call for a prompt withdrawal of U.S. forces was a refreshing contrast to Hillary Clinton's cynical fence-straddling. His position remained clear throughout that campaign; he pledged to have most U.S. combat troops out of Iraq within 16 months after taking office.

But even on the Iraq issue, there are troubling signs that the senator is beginning to "move to the center" for the general election. Already in early July, he indicated that talks with U.S. military commanders during an upcoming trip to Iraq might cause him to "refine" his position regarding a schedule for withdrawal. Opponents of the war immediately subjected him to a barrage of criticism, and he subsequently stated that his commitment to the 16-month timetable has not changed. Nevertheless, the episode raises doubts.

His "refine" comment occurred almost immediately after a motley assortment of foreign-policy advisors to Hillary Clinton's failed campaign joined Obama's team. They included former secretary of state Madeleine Albright, former U.N. ambassador Richard Holbrooke, and former assistant secretary of state Susan Rice—all of them prominent members of the Democratic Party's interventionist wing. Although they are generally critics of the Iraq war, their objections seem to be based on little more than scorn for the Bush administration's inept execution. They give no indication that they are prepared to repudiate their overall fondness for humanitarian intervention and nation building. In fact, they were all enthusiastic

Ted Galen Carpenter, vice president for defense and foreign-policy studies at the Cato Institute, is the author of eight books on international affairs, including Smart Power: Toward a Prudent Foreign Policy for America (2008).

proponents of Bill Clinton's interventions in Haiti, Bosnia, and Kosovo—episodes that had little connection to legitimate U.S. security interests. Albright's casual attitude about military force is epitomized by her infamous comment to Colin Powell: "What's the point of having this superb military that you're always talking about if we can't use it?"

It is not encouraging to see such unrepentant interventionists begin to surround Obama and try to shape his views. Even some of his original advisors, including former national-security advisor Anthony Lake and Harvard professor Sarah Sewell, are little better. Sewell wants to reshape the U.S. military so that it can better perform nation-building missions. If such individuals come to dominate Obama's foreign-policy team, there is little prospect for a more focused, restrained, and sensible security strategy—the kind of "change" that America needs.

While Obama's stance on Iraq has been encouraging (at least thus far), his position on Iran is less so. True, the senator has expressed a willingness to engage in dialogue and negotiations with America's adversaries, including Tehran. Moreover, he did not back down even when Clinton and a bevy of Republicans accused him of being a naive appeaser.

Obama is right to advocate diplomacy. Washington's habit in recent decades of stubbornly refusing to conduct a normal diplomatic relationship with difficult and obnoxious regimes has been a spectacular failure. U.S. leaders pursued that strategy of surly hostility toward China from 1949 to 1972, toward Vietnam for two decades after the end of the Vietnam War, toward North Korea from the late 1940's until the past year or so, toward Cuba for nearly half a century, and toward Iran since the 1979 Islamic revolution. It has consistently failed either to topple the target regime or to effect a desirable change in the regime's policy. When the United States abandoned that approach in the cases of China and Vietnam, however, the result was a much-improved relationship and a marked reduction in tensions. Although there is no certainty that engagement with Iran would produce a similar outcome, Obama's approach offers more promise than does the current strategy—much less Sen. John McCain's enthusiastic flirtation with armed conflict.

Yet Obama muddies the water regarding his policy toward Iran. At the same time that he calls for dialogue and engagement, he advocates trying to impose tougher multilateral sanctions against Tehran—measures that are more likely to antagonize the clerical regime than bring it to the bargaining table. He also panders to the Israel lobby and its supporters by echoing Bush, McCain, and other hawks in saying that America and the international community cannot tolerate a nuclear Iran, and that all options must remain available to prevent such an outcome. In a June speech before the American Israel Public Affairs Committee, Obama stated: "I will do everything in my power to prevent Iran from obtaining a nuclear weapon."

He repeated himself for emphasis, "everything in my power to prevent Iran from obtaining a nuclear weapon. Everything." He added: "I will always keep the threat of military action on the table to defend our security and our ally, Israel. Do not be confused."

That hardly constitutes new or sensible thinking. Obama may be marginally less hawkish than John "bomb bomb bomb, bomb-bomb Iran" McCain, but the difference is not nearly as great as one might wish.

The senator's position on the other nuclear crisis, North Korea, is both sketchy and bland. He does not condemn the Bush administration's commitment to diplomacy through the ongoing six-party talks, but he does quibble that they are too "*ad hoc*." Obama favors a more permanent framework to address not only the nuclear issue but other security concerns in Northeast Asia. At the same time, he favors continuing to use sanctions to pressure Pyongyang to agree to a complete, verifiable, and irreversible end to its nuclear program. The bottom line is that his position is not much different from the Bush administration's over the past two years or so—although his views are less confrontational than the Bush policies during the first few years of the current crisis, and decidedly less confrontational than the policies Senator McCain has advocated.

On an assortment of other issues, Obama's positions are consistent with conventional, mainstream thinking. He shows no willingness, for example, to reconsider Washington's commitment to the hoary North Atlantic alliance. Indeed, he advocates further expansion of NATO, including membership for Albania, Croatia, Macedonia, and—despite the certainty of provoking Russia—Ukraine and Georgia. Obama has praised NATO's interventions in both Bosnia and Kosovo during the Clinton years, and he believes that the February 2008 decision to grant Kosovo independence over the vehement objections of Serbia and Russia was both justified and wise.

On such issues, his perspective is nearly indistinguishable from the views of the foreign-policy establishments in both parties. It embodies the stale, sterile conventional wisdom of a bipartisan consensus. There is certainly no evidence of a desire for meaningful change.

That is most unfortunate, since some of those policies reek of obsolescence and misplaced priorities. For example, Obama's reflexive enthusiasm for NATO ignores mounting evidence that the alliance lacks both the cohesion and the strategic rationale to play a worthwhile security role in the 21st century. NATO's bumbling performance in Afghanistan is only the most visible example. Worse, adding small security clients in the various rounds of expansion creates dangerous liabilities for the United States as the leader of the alliance. An obligation to defend Georgia, for example, could easily entangle America in the fighting between Tbilisi and Moscow over the status of Georgia's secessionist-minded region of South Ossetia. Senator Obama should ask himself how risking a confrontation with a nuclear-armed Russia over such meager

stakes would benefit America.

Likewise, his endorsement of Kosovo's independence is myopic. The policy pursued by Washington and the leading powers in the European Union set a hideous precedent. It has encouraged secessionist forces in numerous countries, especially throughout Asia and Africa, and threatens to ignite or intensify conflicts. That is why countries as diverse as Russia, Spain, Rumania, China, India, and Indonesia all vehemently opposed the U.S.-E.U. action. Although the United States and her allies insist that the Kosovo situation sets no precedent, that is an attitude other countries see as hypocritical or naive. In any case, the policy has created needless tensions in America's relations with key powers and has tossed a live political grenade into the midst of the international system. It does not speak well for Obama's judgment that he endorses such a policy.

Regarding issues on which there are significant divisions between the Democratic and Republican party elites, Obama, not surprisingly, adopts the conventional wisdom of the former. For example, he regards global climate change as a very serious problem that requires concerted diplomacy to get the international community to take action. That is a notable contrast to the more skeptical attitude of the Bush administration and most Republicans, and is even more hardline than the relatively eco-friendly positions that Senator McCain has taken.

Obama's policy views regarding relations with China also adhere to Democratic Party orthodoxy. He accepts Washington's long-standing "one China" policy regarding the status of Taiwan, although he urges Beijing to pursue more flexible and less threatening policies toward Taipei. On the economic front, Obama recognizes the importance of trade with China, but he also reflects the impatience of the Democratic Party's protectionist wing when he charges that Beijing engages in unfair trade practices, especially by manipulating the value of its currency. He even agreed to cosponsor legislation to impose punitive duties on Chinese goods unless constructive action was taken on the currency issue. The senator is at least as critical as John McCain of Beijing's human-rights record. He argues that Tibet should enjoy "meaningful autonomy," and that President Bush should not have made a commitment to attend the opening ceremonies of the Olympics if Beijing's conduct did not improve.

It is on the issue of humanitarian intervention, though, that Obama and his key foreign-policy advisors are most worrisome. In his article "Renewing America's Leadership" (*Foreign Affairs*, July/August 2007) he insisted that

the security and well-being of each and every American depend on the security and well-being of those who live beyond our borders. The mission of the United States is to provide global leadership grounded in the understanding that the world shares a common history and a com-

mon humanity.

That is not much different from the sentiment that President Bush expressed in his Second Inaugural Address—with heavy input from William Kristol and other neoconservatives: "The survival of liberty in our land increasingly depends on the success of liberty in other lands."

But that sentiment is dangerously wrongheaded. Taken to its logical conclusion, it means that America can never be safe or prosperous unless the dozens of chronically misgoverned countries are transformed into free, democratic states. That is a blueprint for endless nation-building missions and perpetual war. It is also a strategy that would fritter away the many advantages America has thanks to her geographic position, her economic dominance, her unparalleled deterrence capabilities, and her pervasive cultural influence in the world.

Indeed, the formulation the Obama team articulates is even worse than the version the Bush administration has pursued. Several of the senator's advisors insist that the guiding principle of U.S. foreign policy should be to promote, defend, and enforce respect for "human dignity." As an operational concept, such a standard would have to improve several notches in terms of substance just to reach vacuous. At best, it would entail Washington becoming the nag of the planet, constantly hectoring other governments to improve their behavior. At worst, it could become an excuse for lavish foreign-aid expenditures and military interventions to protect the downtrodden in failed states or even in functioning countries with repressive regimes. Yet most of the probable arenas for such interventions involve little or no connection to America's tangible interests. Instead, this country would embark on expensive and potentially dangerous humanitarian crusades that would bleed our Armed Forces and drain the treasury.

It will not be much of an improvement if Obama withdraws U.S. forces from Iraq only to launch new interventions in such strategically and economically irrelevant snake pits as Darfur and Burma. That is not the kind of change the American people want or need.

If a President Obama were to adopt a security strategy confined to defending vital American interests, narrowly defined, he would win—and deserve—the gratitude of the American public. If, on the other hand, he were to embrace a nebulous crusade to secure "human dignity" all over the world through the instruments of U.S. foreign aid and military power, he would undermine his own administration and ignite yet another round of frustration and disillusionment about the willingness of political leaders to focus on America's best interests and well-being.

At this point, we cannot be certain which path Barack Obama would take. His foreign-policy views seem to be a work in progress and embody more than a few contradictions. Those of us who advocate a more restrained, sensible, and sustainable foreign policy for the United States need to monitor his campaign closely to gauge the senator's probable course if he becomes president. ◀

A Round Table Discussion
**ALEKSANDR
SOLZHENITSYN**
1918-2008

The Journeys of Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn

by Wayne Allensworth

Many Years

Shukov felt pleased with life as he went to sleep . . . The end of an unclouded day. Almost a happy one. [from *One Day in the Life of Ivan Denisovich*]

The journey is over. Aleksandr Isayevich Solzhenitsyn survived war, the Gulag, and cancer; was exiled from his homeland, only to return, having outlived the Soviet Union as he once predicted he would; and has died in his beloved Russia. To Western eyes, and increasingly to Russian eyes as well, he seemed an exotic figure from a distant past, a bearded prophet from a Hollywood biblical epic, misplaced—or miscast—in the 20th and 21st centuries, a writer who spoke up because he had something important to say and was acting within the traditions of his nation as prophetic artists from its past had. He must have puzzled many, since he had no use for the trappings of celebrity, was not concerned when his ideas proved unpopular, and did not curry favor with the popular media. He often said things many of us, including his friends and admirers, did not want to hear and was prepared to die secure, to rest in peace. He was not embarrassed by his Christian faith, was a patriot who sometimes harshly criticized his countrymen, and was a great artist, which sometimes is forgotten in all the controversies over his pronouncements on politics and society. That he sometimes disappointed his admirers, who had come to expect so much from him, is really a measure of the man himself and a sign of the standing he achieved.

But there was peace in their hearts. They were filled with the fearlessness of those who have lost everything, the fearlessness that is not easy to come by, but which endures. [from *The First Circle*]

Solzhenitsyn's father, an artillery officer on the German front, died before Aleksandr was born, so he was reared by

Contributing editor Wayne Allensworth is the author of The Russian Question (Rowan & Littlefield).

his mother. Brought up as an Orthodox Christian, he later recalled how the old people explained the calamities that had befallen his homeland: "Men have forgotten God." But Solzhenitsyn became a loyal Soviet in his student days, and it would take his arrest and the ordeal of prison to change that—an ordeal for which he was thankful. His reversion to Christianity was accompanied by a sense that he had found his purpose: to be a witness to the truth.

There is a Russian proverb: "The yes-man is your enemy, but a friend will argue with you." It is precisely . . . because my speech is prompted by friendship, that I have come to tell you: My friends, I'm not going to give you sugary words. [from *Warning to the West*]

Solzhenitsyn survived prison, made a miraculous recovery from cancer, and began his writing career, becoming a renowned dissident and rocking the world with his "experiment in literary investigation" in the *Gulag Archipelago*. He was awarded the Nobel Prize for Literature in 1970, was expelled from the Soviet Union in 1974, and came to live in Vermont. It was during this period that he attracted the ire of many in the West, particularly after his Harvard Address. He was no liberal, it became clear, but he was also no conservative in the sense it had come to be understood in the United States, and distortions and misinterpretations were inevitable, beginning with the idea that he hated the West, a strange mirror image of the view of many self-styled "patriots" in his homeland, who declared that he hated Russia. Understanding his positions required deep reading and a serious engagement with his work, which was perhaps expecting too much from many of his critics. His Harvard Address and other speeches were part of what he saw as his mission.

But the present crisis in our country is a much deeper one [than economic], it is a crisis of morality, a crisis so deep that we must not consider that the solutions will come in a decade or even a century. [from

Solzhenitsyn's rehabilitation in his homeland began during the *perestroika* period. In September 1991, the treason charges against him were dropped. In 1994, he returned home to live out his days and finish his literary projects. He was treated with respect by his countrymen, though as one commentator noted after his return, his themes proved "too somber" for many of them. Some of his longtime admirers criticized him for not speaking out more on the issues of the day and for what some of them saw as Kremlin agitprop. I would advise them only to recall his words reproduced above—he criticized when he thought necessary, encouraged when he deemed it appro-

priate, but at his advanced age, and with diminished energy, he concentrated on finishing his life's work.

In his last interview, given to the British newspaper the *Independent*, he was asked, "Are you afraid of death?"

Solzhenitsyn: No. When I was young, the early death of my father cast a shadow over me—and I was afraid to die before all my literary plans came true. But between 30 and 40 years of age my attitude to death became quite calm and balanced. I feel it is a natural, but by no means the final, milestone of one's existence.

Q: Anyhow, we wish you many years of creative life.

Solzhenitsyn: No, no. Don't. It's enough.



Witness to the Truth

by Srdja Trifkovic

Through Every Human Heart

Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn did not share the fate of some 2,000 writers, established or aspiring, who perished during Stalin's reign of terror. Solzhenitsyn lived, against all odds, because he was chosen by God to share his people's Calvary, to stand as its witness, and to provide a rare source of light in the cultural and moral darkness of the past half-century.

The political consequences of Solzhenitsyn's work have been immense. His contribution to the collapse of Soviet communism was greater than that of any other individual, including Ronald Reagan and John Paul II. His unmasking of the Marxist experiment as evil and irredeemable was at odds with the collective striving of his Western contemporaries, among whom Orwell and Koestler were exceptions to the rule set on La Rive Gauche and in Greenwich Village. His *Gulag* is a metaphor not just of Russia but of mankind left to its own devices. It reveals the evil in us and the end of all earthly utopias, but it also sets the stage for spiritual rebirth. It was granted to him, he says in Part II of the *Archipelago*, to carry away from his prison years this essential experience:

how a human being becomes evil and how good. In the intoxication of my youthful successes I had felt myself to be infallible, and I was therefore cruel. In the surfeit of power I was a murderer, and an oppressor. In my most evil moments I was convinced that I was doing good, and I was well supplied with systematic arguments. And it was only when I lay there on rotting prison straw that I sensed within myself the first strivings of good. Gradually it was disclosed to me that the line separating good and evil passes

not through states, nor between classes, nor between political parties either—but right through every human heart—and then all human hearts.

This is a timeless, universal insight. What makes Solzhenitsyn our contemporary, however, what makes him vitally "relevant" in the 21st century, is his diagnosis of the Western malaise famously summarized in his 1978 Harvard University commencement address. He reminded us that, "in early democracies, as in American democracy at the time of its birth, all individual human rights were granted because man is God's creature":

Freedom was given to the individual conditionally, in the assumption of his constant religious responsibility. Such was the heritage of the preceding thousand years. Two hundred or even fifty years ago, it would have seemed quite impossible, in America, that an individual could be granted boundless freedom simply for the satisfaction of his instincts or whims. Subsequently, however, all such limitations were discarded everywhere in the West; a total liberation occurred from the moral heritage of Christian centuries with their great reserves of mercy and sacrifice.

The West ended up "enforcing human rights," Solzhenitsyn said, but "man's sense of responsibility to God and society grew dimmer and dimmer." Three decades later we know just how right he was, and "constant religious responsibility" must be revived if Western civilization is to bounce back from its current state of decrepitude.

Solzhenitsyn's opus revives a theocentric worldview that generations of preceding Western writers and thinkers had rejected in favor of man as the measure of all

Foreign-affairs editor Srdja Trifkovic is the author, most recently, of Defeating Jihad.

things. He knew that, without God, man no longer has any measure. This is a dangerously subversive notion to the Western elite class.

The ideologues confront Solzhenitsyn head on. Thirty years ago Susan Sontag shared a good laugh with Joseph Brodsky over "Solzhenitsyn's views on the United States, his criticism of the press, and all the rest." The *New York Times* obituary asserted that "his condemnations of American politics, press freedoms and social mores struck many as insensitive, haughty and snobbish." Legions of *bien-pensants* were horrified when Solzhenitsyn called the 1999 NATO bombing of Serbia "a grave disillusion, a crushing of ideals." Christopher Hitchens trumped them all by detecting in the "ayatollah-like tones of his notorious Harvard lecture" the germ of his eventual metamorphosis "into a classic Russian Orthodox chauvinist, whose work became more wordy and propagandistic and — shall we be polite? — idiosyncratic with every passing year."

More polite but also more pernicious is the mainstream-media tendency to neuter Solzhenitsyn by ignoring his Christianity altogether, pretending that his political legacy was built independently of his (unstated) inconvenient convictions. The Associated Press thus came up with a 38-paragraph obituary of Solzhenitsyn that hinted at his faith

only once, in a passing reference to his appearance: "with his beard and dour demeanor [he] resembled a figure from an Orthodox icon." This is on par with the Soviet literary establishment's attempt to de-Christianize Tolstoy, or to discover a precursor of socialist realism in Dostoyevsky.

Attempts to separate the "good," pre-Harvard Solzhenitsyn from the "bad," post-Cold War one reflect the schism of heart and mind that has been the bane of Western man since at least the Renaissance. The solution, as Solzhenitsyn knew, is not to argue but to witness the truth:

How easy it is to live with You, O Lord. How easy to believe in You. When my spirit is overwhelmed within me, when even the keenest see no further than the night, and know not what to do tomorrow, You bestow on me the certitude that You exist and are mindful of me, that all the paths of righteousness are not barred. As I ascend into the hill of earthly glory, I turn back and gaze, astonished, on the road that led me here beyond despair, where I too may reflect Your radiance upon mankind. All that I may yet reflect, You shall accord me, and appoint others where I shall fail.

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Russian Patriot

by John Lukacs

Solzhenitsyn's Preoccupation With History

Chronicles has asked me "to participate in a round-table on the contributions and legacy of Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn." His contributions were of enormous importance. His legacy, perhaps less so. Here was a solitary man whose mind was illuminated by a sense of compelling duty: to write a truth, to cut a single clearing in a monstrous forest darkened by untruths. His first great book, about a single man and a single day in a Soviet prison camp, accomplished this. His second book, about the so-called Gulag, was encyclopedic, a description of the vast prison system. These books had a tremendous impact, even larger beyond Russia than within her. They came at the right time when intellectuals in the West, many of them belatedly, started to recognize the magnitude of evils within the Soviet Union — whose rulers were frightened enough to force Solzhenitsyn to leave Russia.

A remarkable element — both motive and purpose of his books — was their sense of history, a need to reveal past events in the history of his nation, ignored by its people. The primacy of this element was something new in the history of Russian literature, something different from

the works of the great Russian writers of the 19th century (though such an impulse and inspiration were there, too, in Pasternak's *Doctor Zhivago*). Such a preoccupation with history marked many of Solzhenitsyn's later books about Russia, 1914-1917, which were less well written and less valuable than his early works; yet this preoccupation may be the main and lasting element of the legacy he left for Russian writers.

A very great writer he was not; his forced exile from Russia sapped not his energies but the roots of his talents. His speech to the students of Harvard, excoriating the materialism and the weakness of "the West," consisted of much more than half-truths; and yet its music, though here and there convincing, sounds somehow not true enough. After his 20 years of exile in the West the cruel phrase about the French Bourbons returning to France might be applied to him, that he had learned nothing and had forgotten nothing; but that, too, is not true enough. Not unlike Dostoyevsky, he sought succor and inspiration from his nationalist religion, extolling faith but suspicious of reason. After the collapse of communism, that was not what Russian minds wanted or needed. But there was nothing false, wrong, or lamentable in the circumstance that the present Russian regime extolled and buried him with high honors. He was a great Russian patriot, after all.

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John Lukacs is an historian and author; most recently, of Blood, Toil, Tears and Sweat: The Dire Warning: Churchill's First Speech as Prime Minister.

by Taki Theodoracopulos

Putin and the Polish Gesture

In 2002, Vladimir Putin told a French reporter who asked about “innocent civilians” killed in Chechnya that—since the journalist evidently sympathized with Muslims—he would arrange to have him circumcised, adding: “I will recommend that they conduct the operation in such a way so that afterwards nothing else will grow.” People of the pompous persuasion were shocked to hear the president of Russia speak, well, the way most normal souls would answer some wise guy trying to score points for his ten seconds of fame. Bravo Vladimir, I cheered at the time. If only more heads of state spoke like that to self-important, busy-body reporters.

Putin happens to be the favorite politician of one of my closest friends. “It’s because he doesn’t sound like the rest of them, and he’s done a hell of a lot for my country,” says his Royal Highness Prince Nicola Romanov, the direct descendant of the last czar and titular head of that tragic family. Romanov is my neighbor in Switzerland, a very tall, extremely well-read gentleman in his mid-80’s, who until recently was president of our ski club in Gstaad. A bit of a comedown, I admit, but Nicola could not have cared less. We elected him in order to chop the heads off the entrenched oligarchy ruining the club, and he did just that. In a very noble manner, that is. “My ancestors must be turning over,” he joked at the time. But back to Putin.

As everyone who doesn’t watch MTV all day knows by now, an important oil pipeline passes through Georgia. For all the idealistic blather about the rights of small nations and ethnic minorities, cynical Realpolitik suggests that neither Moscow nor Washington nor London would be so concerned about the region if oil and gas were not at stake. Behind the scenes, all Russia has to do is threaten the West with an attack on the pipeline if it backs Georgia too much. This

fact does not seem to bother such sofa samurais as the hideous William Kristol, who twins Putin with the leaders of Sudan, Rhodesia, Burma, and North Korea in his urging for Uncle Sam to take a hard line. The trouble is Kristol, as always, has it the wrong way round. There is nothing America can do in that part of the world, Putin not being a weak Milosevic, and Russia not a small country like Serbia. Kristol urges the “civilized world” not to repeat the mistakes of the 30’s, as “delay and irresolution simply invite future threats.”

What a clown this man is. Imagine if Georgia were in the Middle East. He might even consider asking his brood to enlist. (No way.) The only answer to his drivel is Pat Buchanan’s: “Is it better to be a saved Pole, with 7 million dead, or a betrayed Czech with 100,000 dead?” Ironically, parallels between Kosovo and South Ossetia are striking. The Western powers supported the Kosovo separatists with the use of force, including bombing Belgrade. Russia supported South Ossetian separatists with the use of force, including bombing Tbilisi. All Russia has done is follow the lead set by the West in resolving separatist disputes. So why are the usual suspects screaming bloody murder?

My friend Radek Sikorski, Poland’s foreign minister and an ex-*Spectator* writer and colleague, is skating on thin ice by welcoming American weapons to his country. Radek can be excused because he’s a Pole, his country having suffered terribly under Russia and the Soviet Union since time immemorial. But the Kremlin’s reaction to the Polish gesture to Washington was immediate, and its nukes will certainly know how to target their old bases across the border.

Let’s face it. During the Cold War, neither Washington nor Moscow let its satellites get out of hand. In today’s post-Cold War world, small states have



the potential to trigger bigger crises between nuclear-armed powers. The Russians believe that a Polish missile shield has the Russian Federation as its target. Ditto for the Czech Republic, Georgia, and Ukraine. Yet as everyone with an ounce of history knows, the fear of encirclement has characterized Russia for centuries. NATO lost its principal purpose with the collapse of communism. It now serves only Washington’s expansionist instincts. The expansionist urge gained impetus from the neocons in the 1990’s with their Project for the New American Century. But as I said before, the neocons have a Masada complex—as long as others do the dying. Russia and China are not patsies; they are not Iraq or Syria. Uncle Sam can push around the Philippines, Cuba, Mexico, Grenada, Lebanon, and Serbia, but Russia was around long before we were, and has seen it all. Both Napoleon and Hitler failed, and for some strange reason I think Mr. W would be well advised to look into Russian eyes and back off.

Putin is not Hitler or Stalin. He was provoked into invading by a Washington shill. In Russian eyes, the invaders were defending kith and kin. The Anglo-American invasion of Iraq in 2003 was doing nothing of the sort. It was simply following orders from the neocons in order to make the Middle East safer for Israel. What Putin should have done is use Bush’s words. Call for regime change and suggest that Georgian gangsters had contacts with Al Qaeda. The Russians know where their interests lie, and we in America should not waste time lecturing them. ◊

True—or New?

by W. James Antle III

"My opinion with respect to immigration is that, except of useful mechanics and some particular descriptions of men or professions, there is no need of encouragement . . ."

—George Washington

The New Case Against Immigration: Both Legal and Illegal

by Mark Krikorian

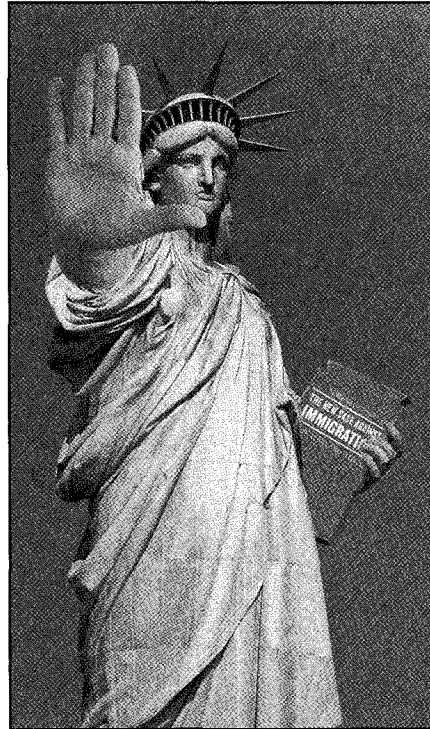
New York: Sentinel; 304 pp., \$25.95



"It's not you, it's me" has become a popular phrase with which to terminate a romantic relationship. It is considered a more polite and, above all, more sensitive way of saying good riddance to an unwanted suitor than rehearsing whatever grievances actually prompted the breakup. But the phrase carries an air of insincerity that prevents it from really lessening the blow. Urban Dictionary, which is to pop-culture trash as the Oxford English Dictionary is to the English language, translates it as follows: "I no longer find you attractive, but I can't say that because then I'll feel guilty."

Mark Krikorian begins *The New Case Against Immigration: Both Legal and Illegal* with a sentiment that sounds suspiciously similar. "What's different about immigration today as opposed to a century ago," he writes, "is not the characteristics of the newcomers but the characteristics of our society." A paragraph later, Krikorian explains, "We've all heard the laments: 'My grandpa from Sicily learned English, and my grandma from Minsk got by without welfare—what's the prob-

W. James Antle III is associate editor of The American Spectator.



Melanie Anderson

lem with immigrants today?" His answer to this question is instructive: "The problem is that the America your grandparents immigrated to a century ago no longer exists."

Krikorian is executive director of the Center for Immigration Studies, one of the most prominent think tanks advocating a more realistic immigration policy. He has been a vocal proponent of the attrition-through-enforcement strategy of reducing illegal immigration, which is already showing limited signs of success. His new book is a masterful, comprehensive presentation of the technical arguments against continuous mass immigration in the tradition of Roy Beck's *The Case Against Immigration* and Peter Brimelow's *Alien Nation*. So let us assume that Krikorian's opening line

is sincere. Is his argument correct? In other words, is the problem with millions of legal and illegal immigrants pouring into the United States not them, but us?

In fact, as is often the case in a failed relationship, there is plenty of blame to go around. Not only do Americans today lack the cultural self-confidence and political will to demand that immigrants enter the country legally, much less assimilate, but we lack the strong common culture and national identity that allowed us, with greater difficulty, to "Americanize" newcomers to our shores during the last period of mass immigration. American schoolchildren are fed a dog's breakfast of multiculturalism and political correctness, in which they learn that the people who settled and founded our country were genocidal and irredeemably racist. This is as damaging as any bilingual-education program for the children of immigrants.

It is frankly more normal and natural for Mexican immigrants to want to cling to their own languages and family ties than for our own country to permit a sustained assault on its national myths, heroes, and customs. Even apart from mass immigration, Americans are divided about who we are as a people, about moral values, about our national sense of self. We no longer require immigrants to assimilate and no longer provide much for them to assimilate to.

Krikorian does not state things

so baldly as this, but he recognizes the problem of assimilation and “the cracked melting pot.” He correctly observes that modern technology makes it easier for immigrants to keep in touch with their homelands and even live in both countries. This, as a practical matter, makes rootedness more problematic. But he also acknowledges the erosion of our common culture, especially among the political class:

Elites in all modern societies, including ours, come to devalue their own nation and culture and thus recoil from the idea that newcomers should even be required to adopt “our language, manners and customs,” let alone “be brought into complete harmony with our ideals and aspirations”—assuming we can even agree, in this contentious age, what those ideals and aspirations are.

Krikorian argues (correctly) that this combination of transnationalism and multiculturalism—“post-Americanism”—means that “mass immigration today is much less likely to result in the kind of deep assimilation of the vast majority of immigrants and their children that is necessary for immigration to be successful,” even if the immigrants are skilled and legal. But it is less clear that this “problem is inherent to modern society and the way that modernity limits our ability to replicate the successes of the past.” If true, that seems as likely to doom a politics of restrictionism as to help it succeed.

The “brutal bargain” of assimilation is not the only familiar problem Krikorian wraps in the new package of mass immigration’s incompatibility with modern society. “Modern America faces a unique security challenge,” he writes. “Advances in communications, transportation, and weapons technology make it relatively easy for enemies to get access to our home territory and stage spectacular and deadly attacks.” Uncontrolled mass immigration overwhelms the

federal government’s already limited administrative capacity to screen out or remove those who would commit terrorist attacks.

The visa applications of at least 15 of the 19 September 11 hijackers should have been rejected at first glance. The other four were destroyed by the State Department before they could be subjected to outside scrutiny. By contrast, when the law is actually enforced, it can have salutary national-security effects. Ramzi Bainalshibh, “one of the candidates for the label of twentieth hijacker,” was rejected four times because immigration bureaucrats thought he was likely to overstay his visa and become an illegal immigrant.

“But the problem cannot be satisfactorily addressed by such administrative measures,” writes Krikorian. Proper vetting is impossible at the current high level of admissions. The problem would only be exacerbated by an unwieldy conditional amnesty for illegal aliens along the lines of the McCain-Kennedy bill. All the window dressing intended to reassure gullible voters that lawbreakers don’t get to cut in line ahead of legal immigrants and that criminal aliens are screened out only makes such plans unworkable. After the 1986 amnesty, some 90 percent of the applicants were approved, and the numbers were twice what had been projected. By some estimates, the fraud rate was higher than 70 percent.

Unskilled immigration is also newly presented as a conflict between open borders and modern America. Krikorian rightly rebuts two familiar claims on both sides of the immigration debate. The first is that immigrants tend to be lazy and come to America to collect welfare rather than work. While there are exceptions, the labor-force participation rate of the major immigrant groups proves this stereotype false. But that fact doesn’t validate the *Wall Street Journal*’s view of mass immigration as an economic boon to the United States. Even though the immigrants are hard-working, they are dependent on social services and means-tested government benefits anyway because they have low skills.

Half of all families headed by a Mex-

ican immigrant use at least one major welfare program, Krikorian points out. As early as 1990, 9.1 percent of immigrant households were consuming welfare benefits, compared with 7.4 percent of native-born households. The numbers are likely worse today. Krikorian frames the issue this way:

[W]hile immigration certainly increases the overall size of our economy, it subverts the widely shared economic goals of a modern society: a large middle class open to all, working in high-wage, knowledge-intensive, and capital-intensive jobs exhibiting growing labor productivity and avoiding too skewed a distribution of income.

Krikorian cites the increasingly well-documented statistics showing that mass unskilled immigration worsens income inequality, strains social-services budgets, depresses the wages of working-class Americans, and harms both the living standards and employment opportunities of black American workers. Drawing on the work of Harvard economist George Borjas, he reports that “immigration reduced the average American high-school dropout’s income in 2000 by about \$1,800, while the American college graduate saw his salary reduced by \$2,600.” It is now the consensus among labor economists that the post-1965 immigration influx has produced a minuscule economic benefit to Americans as a whole.

The skill levels of immigrants relative to the U.S. labor force have continued to decline since the 1990’s, worsening all of the above trends and retarding Hispanic economic assimilation. As *Washington Post* columnist Robert Samuelson has written, “Only an act of willful denial can separate immigration and poverty.” Yet the political class has been unmoved by this mountain of data and can easily dispatch its own court economists to rattle off rosier-sounding statistics.

In contrast with our Ellis Island past, Krikorian argues, the U.S. economy does not need as much unskilled

immigration, although its supply will always create demand from employers in need of cheap labor. We also have a much more highly developed welfare state, from which it is difficult to exclude immigrants and their families, passing on the bill for these labor savings to the taxpayer. Krikorian quotes the famous line from Milton Friedman: "It's just obvious that you can't have free immigration and a welfare state." Years later, this conclusion remains anything but obvious to scores of free-market economists on the right and inveterate welfare statists on the left.

Multiculturalism, transnational progressivism, affirmative action, the welfare state—Krikorian has provided many good reasons to fault our own society, rather than the immigrants themselves, for the failures of mass immigration. In addition, it is less toxic politically than discussing the characteristics of the Third World countries

that are the source for most of our current immigration. And morally, a humane movement to restrict immigration must be based on love of our own culture and customs, not hatred of those of others. But it is a bit disingenuous to pretend that the post-1965 immigration inflows do not differ in any meaningful way from past waves—or to romanticize those past waves at the expense of today's. "In a sense," Krikorian writes, "third-world immigration has been happening from very early on, if we interpret 'third world' broadly to mean 'the kind of unsavory places that people want to leave.'"

Decent, as well as political, instincts undergird that argument. But I suspect Patrick Buchanan's nuanced statement about Third World immigration is closer to the mark. "Any man or any woman, of any color or creed, can be a good American," Buchanan wrote in *State of Emergency*. "We know that from our history. But when it comes

to the ability to assimilate into a nation like the United States, all nationalities, creeds, and cultures are not equal." It is an important argument, and Krikorian will receive no credit from the other side for failing to make it. A better restrictionist response to the inevitable charge of racism is that the open-borders proponents are the ones who want to import a predominantly nonwhite servant class to benefit an overwhelmingly white elite at the expense of poor Americans who are themselves disproportionately black and Hispanic.

Krikorian's approach allows libertarian and neoconservative critics to make a counterproposal: Keep high levels of immigration and get rid of multiculturalism, the welfare state, affirmative action, and the mind-sets that make all of the above possible. Krikorian anticipates all of these objections and offers some good rejoinders of his own, in particular showing that attempts to block immigrants from using welfare have failed. Anyone who has taken an introductory political-science class knows that a government program becomes harder to end as the number of beneficiaries rise.

But if our welfarism and multiculturalism are the only culprits, why scapegoat immigrants fleeing unpleasant countries? And if the American attitudes that permit mass immigration are so entrenched, how can any restrictionism possibly succeed? If we are truly committed to the idea that no one can be poor and none of our policies can have a disparate impact on Hispanics or any other group, immigration reduction is off the table.

Finally, the biggest problem associated with mass immigration is the presence of large numbers of people who do not see themselves as Americans, would prefer not to be here if the economy at home permitted, and have both real and imagined historical grievances against the United States. A restrictionist tract that does not deal with this reality—or directly challenge the notion that American obligations to the world's poor are essentially limitless—can move the debate only so far. ◀

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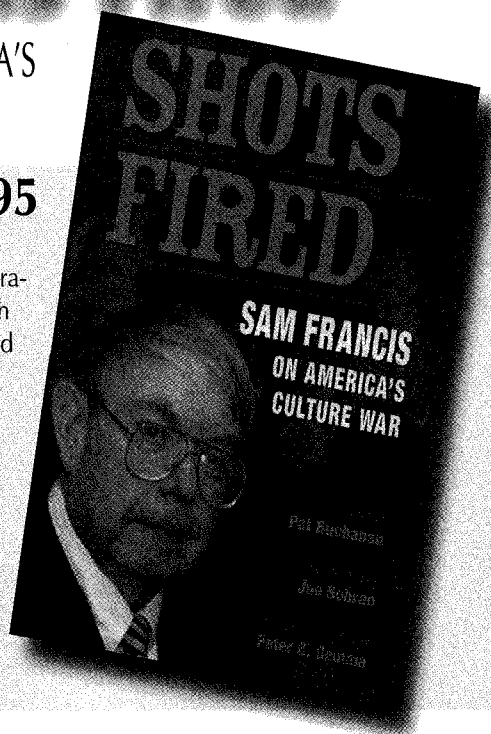
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Think Again

by Clyde Wilson

A Time to Fight: Reclaiming a Fair and Just America

by Sen. Jim Webb

New York: Broadway Books;
255 pp., \$24.95



This book would have been better entitled "A Time to Think." It contains some good thinking but not much fight. Doubtless the author and publisher knew that *Fighting* is a better sell than *Thinking*.

Barack Obama will have chosen his running mate by the time this review reaches readers. At the time of writing there has been some speculation that James Webb, the maverick new Democratic senator from Virginia, might be Obama's choice. If so, and if he were to accept, Webb would betray himself and everything that his life has meant.

Webb is a man of Southern pioneer stock (the only kind of Old American left these days). A Marine officer combat veteran. A Republican Defense Department official who resigned on a matter of principle and who, instead of taking the normal gravy train to the industry side of the military-industrial complex, became a writer of books, including a Vietnam War novel of high merit. A politician who can actually think unprefabricated thoughts and express them with clarity rather than obfuscation, whose first impulse incredibly appears to be to search out what is right and true and in the interests of the people rather than what is personally profitable.

Ticket balancing would be stretched beyond credibility with Webb and Obama, the latter being the epitome of affirmative action, imperial chic, hot marketing, and Wall Street respectability, even though Webb believes—and it is so tempting to grasp at the delusion that he might be on to something—that there is potential for the Democratic Party to adapt to meet the real problems of the day. The Repub-

lican or Stupid Party has never had much honesty, vision, or adaptability (except as to packaging). The Democrats, as Webb puts it, are in thrall to the social issues and have abandoned their historic representation of us plain folks as well as seriously offended us. The plain folks have thus presented the Republican Party with a great marketing target, changing its sales pitch though not its agenda, which has always been the respectable servicing of corporations and the less intelligent political aspirants. Somehow, the Democrats are to be persuaded to abandon their embrace of moral degeneracy and once more become champions of the workers.

Webb's description of the present unprecedented and perilous condition of the American polity is original (for a politician), right on target, argued with conviction, and convincing in chapter and verse: the ongoing proletarianization of the American middle class; the canonization of greed and routine government capitulation to the desires of international capital (privatization of profit and socialization of risk); the puerile failure to develop a genuine foreign policy since the end of the Cold War; the failure of courage and honor among the high military brass resulting in senseless military adventures in "a no-win region." And, worst of all, these critical matters are not even mentioned in the canned discourse of the noble leaders of our two parties so dedicated to the welfare of We the People.

Senator Webb has as fine a diagnosis of our ills as we can hope for. Unfortunately, he comes up lame in the matter of a cure. All he has to offer is a Reaganesque, Marine Corps pep talk. He harbors the quaint belief that the Constitution is still operative. He thinks that "our problems are not systemic," that we can-do Americans just need to "find good leaders and hold them accountable." As to how this is to be accomplished, he does not say. In other words, he thinks our ills result from wrong attitudes and decisions. He gives no credit to the evidence that they reflect a condition of mind and soul that must inexorably

lead to the imperialization of a formerly republican society.

Webb is the author of a popular (and rather misguided) history book on the Scots-Irish contribution to America. Let me therefore quote the wisdom of another fighting Scots-Irishman, John C. Calhoun, who in 1844 wrote Orestes Brownson about the two-party system:

The first step, towards any effectual reform, is to put down and disgrace party machinery & management. No device ever was adopted better calculated to gull the community; to put down all individuality & manliness of feeling, & keep the people in ignorance.

It is good to know that there is one senator who can't be bought, but one is not nearly enough.

Contributing editor Clyde Wilson columnizes regularly on ChroniclesMagazine.org under the rubric The Old Republic.

Mystery and (Polack) Manners

by Jack Trotter

North of the Port

by Anthony Bukoski

Dallas: Southern Methodist University;
192 pp., \$22.50



In "The Shadow Players," one of 12 stories in Anthony Bukoski's most recent collection, Lance Corporal Pete Dziedzic returns to his childhood home in Superior, Wisconsin, after a four-year tour of duty in Vietnam. The year is 1967. Physically unscathed by the war, he finds himself adrift. His old girlfriend, tired of waiting for him, is now married. He is reluctant to follow his father's advice and work in the local flour mill, where the old man has labored for 40 relent-

less years. Pete spends a lot of time avoiding his father, Al, who calls him "Glupiec" (Polish for "blockhead"). He keeps a second-hand Rambler parked next to the family garage. Although he doesn't yet know how to drive, the car represents the possibility of escape from the bleak prospects on offer in Superior. When his father becomes gravely ill, Pete sits day and night beside his bed and makes shadow figures on the wall with his hands. One night he lights the holy candles and attempts to create a silhouette of the Black Madonna. "A crown in a flicker of candlelight is not easy to make," he thinks. But somehow his father, drugged on morphine, seems to understand: "His hands rose into the air as if he were holding a chalice of wine, a wafer, a cup of morphine. . . . In the half-light, his hands ran gently over something only he saw." When Al begins to mutter words in Polish that sound like "Holy Mother," Pete understands that his amateurish shadow play has been lifted out of the mundane realm by a power greater than his: "Pete knew . . . who had entered the shadows of the bedroom to match his father's suffering with Her own."

What is perhaps most remarkable about this story and many others in *North of the Port* is how naturally and with what profound respect Bukoski portrays traditional, Christian religious faith. I can think of no other living writer of fiction, at least none of Bukoski's literary stature, about whom one might make such a claim. Virtually all of the short stories here are suffused with the traditions of the Polish Catholicism of Bukoski's own childhood in northwest Wisconsin, where he was born in 1945. But this richly ethnic Catholicism with its images of the Black Madonna and its Forty Hours devotions is more than just a colorful backdrop. For, by all appearances, Bukoski shares the faith of his many devout—if often comically flawed—characters. In an interview published in the 1995-96 issue of the *Wisconsin Academy Review*, he speaks of the bleak landscape of northwest Wisconsin, where he still lives, and of the long, harsh winters: "We struggle

against this," he says, "and I think part of the struggle, the people going to Mass, the people with religious icons at home . . . is our great struggle to find heaven." Note the "we" and "our" in this quotation; Bukoski places no spiritual distance between himself and the people he writes about, the same people that he rubs up against every day. Nowhere in this collection is there even a trace of condescension regarding matters of faith.

On the other hand, Bukoski is clearly aware of the sometimes bizarre and superstitious manifestations of the Catholicism of the Polish diaspora and does not hesitate to leaven his fiction with them—not simply for risible effect, but because they often lend themselves to sublime metaphorical purposes. For instance, in "Gossamer Bloom," on Assumption Day in Superior in 1950, "thousands of thread-like strands began falling from a sky as blue as the Virgin's robes." The old women departing Mass believe that these strands are "Jesus' white hairs," a sign that He is "unhappy with the world." As the mysterious strands keep falling, a local biologist offers the scientific explanation: tree-climbing orb-web spiders are "hatching their young" and sending out threads from their abdomens. But the beautiful Magda Podgorak, married to a hardworking mill hand, takes the falling strands as a sign from Jesus that she, too, might soar aloft. After she survives a leap from a railroad trestle, young Andrzej Iwanowski understands that "something was wrong with Magda, something in her mind," but that doesn't stop him from forming an attachment to her that is at once spiritual and erotic. When her husband is away, Magda invites Andrzej into her house and speaks of spiritual things to him as she stands before a mirror, kissing "the image she believed was God's." Aroused by this, "He wished [Magda] knew what he couldn't confess to the priest about his indecent thoughts." But just when the reader is convinced that the relationship between Magda and the virgin Andrzej is about to blossom into a full-blown affair, Magda becomes

convinced that she is destined to be a "victim soul" like St. Margaret Mary Alacoque. She speaks obsessively of flying. Then one day, she simply disappears. Some believe that she was assumed into Heaven like the Blessed Virgin. Andrzej himself seems half-convinced of that miraculous possibility. Yet, at a deeper level, Magda's disappearance suggests a larger mystery that will one day "be revealed to us all." In the hands of another sort of writer, such a tale would have developed into little more than an interesting study in religious mania. For Bukoski, wherever one turns there are mysteries enveloped within mysteries. Yet that awareness does not override his insistent spiritual realism. Embedded within the story there is a kernel of cautionary wisdom worthy of Aquinas. Speaking of his departed wife, Magda's husband Felix laments: "Some won't be happy to trust the Lord's word. They want proof of his body on earth. If they don't find it, they have to see for themselves if there is a Heaven."

Bukoski has stated that one of his aims as a writer is to "mark the passing of the immigrant population that I know best." Poles began to immigrate into Wisconsin in the 1880's. Most went to Milwaukee, but thousands more settled along the southwestern reaches of Lake Superior. Because the soil in that region is poor, few became farmers. Instead, they became longshoremen, seamen, and mill hands; they worshiped in Polish-American parishes; and they sent their children to Polish Catholic schools, like St. Adalbert's in Superior, where Bukoski and his father before him were students. In recent decades the unique ethnic identity that once characterized the region has begun to fade. In the early 1980's, the Polish parish churches of the diocese were closed and razed by Bishop George Hammes. The official reason given was a shortage of priests, but Bukoski implies (in the *Wisconsin Academy Review* interview) that there may have been other reasons. While he does not elaborate, I suspect that these intensely ethnic parishes (and their schools) may have fallen victim to the *aggiornamento* ush-

ered in by Vatican II. More recently, the mills and factories that once provided employment to so many have also begun to close. Thus, many among the most recent generation of young Poles have moved elsewhere.

Traces of such changes are evident in several of Bukoski's stories. In one of these, "The Wally Na Zdrowie Show" (an earlier version of which appeared in these pages in the October 2006 issue), an aging accordion player and erstwhile Polka star laments the closing of the Polish Club (for lack of members) and the hardboard factory where he once labored. With arthritic hands he fills his house with the strains of "Dreamer's Waltz" and plays the nursing home circuit, where the dying Poles of his own generation still thrill to the sounds of "I'm From Planet Polka." He writes to his son, who has long since moved away, that he's thinking of selling the accordion to make ends meet.

More often than not, the fictions in *North of the Port* do not dwell on such changes. Instead, Bukoski lovingly, comically probes the passions and frailties of working-class Poles, lifting them out of obscurity and bestowing upon them a surprising dignity. In one of the most poignant, and hilarious, pieces, "Antoni Kosmatka Resists the Goddess of Love," an aging Guardian of the Sick at the Superior Polish Club desperately tries to rouse the club's members from a long stupor of inactivity. Old men, they no longer seem to have any interest in Christmas parties, dances, or Lenten fish fries. Then one night Anthony Kosmatka convinces them to travel to a Duluth strip club where Miss Nude Poland has been engaged. The men require little persuading. But for Anthony, the trip proves to be an embarrassing disaster. Among other misfortunes, he falls hopelessly in love with Miss Nude Poland. On the following day, a "Shaming Ordinance" arrives in his mailbox. Such ordinances are supposed to shame people into keeping up their property, but since the Kosmatkas have been responsible property owners, they are mystified. Anthony suspects, to his horror, that he

is being shamed for his rather undignified behavior at the strip club. But after 42 years of marriage to the nagging Mrs. Kosmatka, his obsession with Miss Nude Poland overcomes his shame. He repeatedly calls the strip club and proposes to run away with the stripper. He packs a suitcase, to Mrs. Kosmatka's bewilderment, and waits on the front porch beneath the Polish flag, certain that Miss Nude Poland will call for him. After four days, he finally awakens to his foolishness, but not without a degree of self-deception: "He told himself he'd been sorely tempted by a goddess of love, but remained faithful to his wife because the Polish club requires her members to conduct themselves as gentlemen." In Bukoski's fictional world, even aging fools are capable of attaining a momentary state of grace. The look of pity on his forgiving wife's face makes Anthony see how even the shaming ordinance with his name spelled in the Polish way (Antoni) is a "holy sign." Humiliated, he carries his suitcase "into the house where his beloved wife was cooking a hearty supper of spare ribs, sauerkraut, and boiled potatoes."

North of the Port is Bukoski's fifth collection of short stories; the first, *Twelve Below Zero*, appeared in 1986. In spite of the rare quality of his talent, he has received precious little critical attention from the literary establishment. Apparently, our fashionable multiculturalism is willing to embrace almost any manifestation of cultural diversity, so long as it isn't quite so ethnic as Polish-American Catholicism. Is there an ugly truth hidden in this? If so, perhaps it is this: At the heart of the diversity cult lies a vacuous sterility. It lauds ethnic difference only when it has been, so to speak, properly castrated and persuaded to dance on cue for the deracinated denizens of the Global Village. Bukoski, bless his heart, will have none of this. His attention to place, to a particular people and cultural tradition, is something we need more of these days. Fifty years ago, masters of the short story such as Peter Taylor, Flannery O'Connor, and J.F. Powers managed to find ma-

ior publishers and an avid audience of appreciative readers. Bukoski's work, though it may lack something of the philosophical and theological reach of O'Connor's, or the stylistic compression of Powers', deserves to be mentioned in that august company. And the Southern Methodist University Press should be congratulated for its continued willingness to publish its impressively packaged editions of this writer's splendid productions.

*Jack Trotter writes from
Charleston, South Carolina.*

G.K. Chesterton, Peacemaker

by Chris Chan

**Chesterton on War and Peace:
Battling the Ideas and Movements
That Led to Nazism and World War II**

*edited by Michael W. Perry
Seattle: Inkling Books; 448 pp., \$24.95*



G.K. Chesterton's writings are as prescient today as they were over three quarters of a century ago. When he wrote most of the essays in this anthology during the early 20th century, he was either warning Great Britain about the impending dangers of war or offering advice on how to create a state of peace. This new collection, selected and edited by Michael W. Perry, contends that Chesterton was one of the great voices of sanity during his era, calling for genuine peace while many of the most celebrated thinkers of the time were doing their best to let the world either burn or freeze.

Chesterton took aim at both the militarists and the pacifists of his day. He attacked the militarists for attempting to advance their personal agendas through bloodshed and destruction, and he pilloried the pacifists for being so desperate to avoid conflict that they deliberately misrepresented the international situation and were willing to

sell out other people's rights and freedoms so as not to inconvenience their own positions of comfort and desires for the future.

One pacifist in particular is singled out for attack by Perry: Sir Norman Angell, the 1933 winner of the Nobel Peace Prize. In presenting Angell with his award, committee member and fellow Peace Prize Laureate Christian Lous Lange declared, "It is mankind's deep tragedy that it so rarely sees reality . . . We see what we desire to see, not naked reality." In Perry's estimation, this line ought to be Angell's epitaph. While Angell's fans claimed that their man was able to assess the international situation with greater clarity and precision than the other pundits of his day, Perry indicates that Angell recklessly circulated erroneous beliefs about German harmlessness and patronizing assumptions about human nature. Throughout this book, Perry takes aim at Angell and similar thinkers who contend that peace requires people to pretend that potential problems do not exist.

Perry's thesis centers on his contention that Chesterton's efforts to promote real peace and to restore sanity to discussions of international politics ought to have earned him the 1933 Nobel Peace Prize. In particular, Chesterton's far-seeing warnings about the dangers of Nazism, coupled with his denunciations of eugenics and genocide at a time when most leaders were calling for unthinking appeasement and elites almost universally embraced racist science, ought to have earned him better notice. Unfortunately, no matter how fully the ensuing decades might have proved Chesterton prescient, his clashing with the popular trends of his day probably cost him

the prestige Perry thinks he deserved. Nearly every one of Chesterton's essays is prefaced with a short introduction by Perry explaining Chesterton's major points and why his predictions proved right where the confident assertions of prominent men turned out to be so fatally misguided. Particularly pithy and insightful lines are highlighted in bold, although many of Chesterton's better quotations have not been singled out for special attention.

Throughout the book, Chesterton continually warns against warfare while stressing that sometimes nations have to take up arms because it would be immoral not to stand up for something right or to battle something utterly wrong. In one 1908 *Illustrated London News* column, he wrote:

There are some things more important than peace, and one of them is the dignity of human nature. It is a humiliation of humanity that humanity should ever give up war solely through fear, especially through fear of the mere machines that humanity itself has made. We all see the absurdity of modern armaments. It is a grotesque end for the great European story that each of us should keep on stuffing pistols into his pockets until he falls down with the weight of them. But it is still worse that we should only be friends because we are too nervous to stand the noise of a pistol . . .

I would have any war, however long and horrible, sooner than such a horrible peace. I would run any risk rather than submit to such a spiritual indig-

nity as that man dare not, for the most crying justice or the most urgent chivalry, turn one of his own handles. War is an absolute calamity; so be it. Then let man silence his guns, but, in the name of human honour, do not let his guns silence him.

Chesterton does an excellent job in getting his view across, but the editor's commentary enhances it a great deal. Indeed, Perry's introductions and personal commentary compose roughly 20 percent of the book. Perry has heavily annotated the essays because of the obscurity of some of the political and cultural references, and his additions are a highly welcome supplement. Perry's efforts are clearly a labor of love, and the impact of the book is all the more intense for being fueled by the passion of a fan who mourns the fact that more people did not pay attention to Chesterton's writings during his lifetime. It might have made all the difference for Europe in the decades to come.

The Appendix to the book contains brief selections on the nature of armed conflict by St. Thomas Aquinas, Winston Churchill, Norman Angell, George Bernard Shaw, Bertrand Russell, Mohandas K. Gandhi, and H.G. Wells. Perry contends that the worldviews of the latter five contrast starkly with Chesterton's. Aquinas's and Churchill's acknowledgements of the horrors of war, coupled with their statements that war is on certain occasions necessary to preserve justice, coincide well with Chesterton's essays in this collection. While the additional opinions help to give breadth to the ideological spectrum, it seems unfitting that Mr. H.G. Wells should have the last word in this anthology. And it is not quite clear from the brief excerpt included here why Gandhi's views on the nature of conflict and resistance are opposed to Chesterton's. Perry might have gone on to add a short epilogue to put the differing opinions into better context.

Chris Chan is a contributing editor to Gilbert Magazine.

**E-mail your letter
to the editor.**

polemics@chroniclesmagazine.org

The Psychopathic Press

According to medical consensus, a psychopath is a person who feels no connection with other people, and who cannot therefore know the slightest remorse, any shame or guilt, no matter how horrendous the sufferings he inflicts. And that brings me, neatly, to the *New York Times*, the nation's newspaper of record, and an exemplar of psychopathic behavior.

This past summer, the *Times* reported prominently on the suicide of scientist Bruce Ivins, who had become the leading suspect in the still-mysterious anthrax attacks that further terrified an already shaken America in the months following the September 11 attacks. Although his motivation remains uncertain, the media speculated that Ivins might have launched these attacks in order to gain financially, or perhaps to draw further government support for his own research. I stress the word *speculated*, as it is unlikely that any evidence against the man would have stood up in court. As the *Times* properly noted, the evidence was quite circumstantial, and any account from government agencies must be read with due caution. For reasons I will make clear shortly, this last remark should leave observers gasping with amazement at the paper's gall.

In passing, the *Times* also noted that the government probably planned a full exoneration of the previous prime suspect, Dr. Steven J. Hatfill. The federal Department of Justice had publicly identified Hatfill as a "person of interest" in the case, and accordingly subjected him to a multiyear investigation that found no significant evidence against him but destroyed his career in the process. Some months ago, Hatfill won a multi-million-dollar settlement from the government, which acknowledged some of its abuses and missteps in the case. But what the *New York Times* did not even mention in this lamentable tale was its

own horrendous role in acting as a conduit for every vile, false, and poorly substantiated report it could scare up against Dr. Hatfill, all apparently published on the authority of federal agencies, with no discernible evidence of external confirmation. The *Times* was, in fact, performing the exact role that journalists serve in totalitarian regimes when the secret police have decided that X is an enemy of the people, and his reputation must be undermined as a justification for a later show trial.

Just how ghastly the stories presented against Hatfill were still beggars belief. In 2002, the *Times*'s Nicholas Kristof published a series of pieces against a mysterious mad scientist code-named "Mr. Z," who came across as a latter day Josef Mengele. Allegedly, Z had worked with South African and Rhodesian authorities. Kristof asked the FBI,

Have you examined whether Mr. Z has connections to the biggest anthrax outbreak among humans ever recorded, the one that sickened more than 10,000 black farmers in Zimbabwe in 1978-80?

Why did such a monster work in a U.S. government lab where he had access not just to anthrax but to Ebola? The public was therefore duly primed when the DOJ identified Hatfill as its primary "person of interest." Charges were presumably imminent.

But of course, they were not imminent, as the FBI had nothing concrete on which to proceed. They knew that Hatfill was a researcher with access to anthrax of the type linked to the attacks, and that he had written a novel about a fictional anthrax campaign undertaken on U.S. soil. But they could not go further unless Hatfill could be provoked or embarrassed into doing something stupid, into breaking cover,



perhaps by trying to seek out his special stash of deadly spores—and that is why they needed a subservient and uncritical press. Although Hatfill ultimately failed in his libel suit against the *Times* and Kristof personally, the affair stands as a model of how law-enforcement agencies channel information in order to promote their ends, and how thoroughly they can expect to get their way.

One sickening part of the whole affair was Kristof's disingenuous reaction when Hatfill's name became public, and it was obvious whom all the "Z" stories were describing. Kristof denied having leaked information about the man, noting smugly that "I didn't name him. But over the weekend, Mr. Z named himself: He is Steven J. Hatfill." Note the suggestion there that Hatfill's name came to light not because of systematic leaks from the FBI or the Department of Justice, but because the mass murderer spontaneously decided to come out of the closet. For Kristof and the *Times*, there was no guilt, no remorse, no shame.

In 2002, in some articles published in *Chronicles*, I denounced Kristof's campaign against Dr. Hatfill. I concluded: "Seeing how slavishly media outlets like the *New York Times* reproduce official statements, I sometimes refer to that newspaper half-seriously by the name of *American Pravda*. Following this latest affair, I would like to apologize to *Pravda*." The apology stands. ◊



Diversity Is Our Strength

As the summer slid into August, gasoline prices fell a bit, back to about \$3.79 per gallon here in the Midwest, and even that modest reprieve seemed to dispel some of the summertime blues. Traffic on the interstates around Lake Michigan was not quite up to normal August levels (on Sunday afternoon of the second weekend in August, we sailed through Chicago without ever coming to a standstill), but it had picked up from earlier in the summer.

As the November election approaches, the Bush administration will undoubtedly put some pressure on Big Oil, now reporting its third straight year of record profits, to lower the cost of gasoline a little more in hopes of giving a boost to the economy and improving the chances of Republican presidential candidate John McCain. But in the long run, 2008 will not prove another 1973 or 1979. Gasoline prices—energy prices in general—will continue to fluctuate, but they are not likely to decline significantly.

Fewer people are laughing at James Howard Kunstler these days, as “peak oil” is becoming a relatively common phrase. On the other hand, the number of people who are seriously discussing what all this will mean for the United States—economically, culturally, even politically—is still relatively small. It is not just the end, as I lamented a few months ago, of the automobile culture and the summertime activities that accompanied it. Higher energy costs are rippling throughout the economy. The Consumer Price Index will likely hit four to five percent this year, nearly twice the average rate over the last decade. Food prices are rising at an alarming rate, since most of what we eat has taken a double hit: The cost of production has risen, as has the cost of transporting the average food item 1,500 miles from the point of production to the point of distribution. And that is before we consider the increased cost of driving out to the edge of town

to purchase a tasteless, watery pink tomato from the Wal-Mart that put the grocery store in your neighborhood out of business several years ago.

In the midst of this increase in energy prices, the continued recovery of manufacturing in Rockford (which I discussed in the July 2008 issue) may seem rather surprising. Green County, Wisconsin, home of General Motors’ doomed Janesville assembly plant, is already hurting from cutbacks in production 18 months before the scheduled shuttering of the facility, which manufactures Suburbans and light trucks. In the late 70’s and early 80’s, much of Rockford’s manufacturing crisis, including double-digit unemployment rates, could be traced to the close ties between the Big Three auto makers and local small manufacturers. So why is manufacturing in Rockford doing relatively well, when some financial analysts are calling for GM, with its relatively paltry \$6.4 billion market cap, to be removed from the Dow Jones Industrial Average?

Dean Olson, the chairman of Rockford Acromatic and a member of the board of directors of The Rockford Institute, pointed me to the answer (which now seems rather obvious): Most small manufacturers in Rockford and elsewhere throughout the Midwest no longer depend on the Big Three for any significant portion of their business. Free-trade agreements and the decline in the strength of the United Auto Workers and other unions enabled the Big Three to cut those longstanding ties and to outsource much of their component production. Since the mid to late 90’s, the proportion of foreign-made parts in your “American-made” car has increased steadily. In most cases, “American-made” amounts to not much more than “American-assembled” these days.

In other words, manufacturing in Rockford and across the Midwest is doing a bit better than we might ex-



pect right now because of the previous recession in manufacturing that I have discussed extensively in this column over the past eight years—a recession that was caused, in part, by the redistribution of production overseas. Those companies that survived might still make parts for the auto industry, but few of them are joined at the hip to one of the Big Three anymore.

That is not to say that small manufacturers are out of the woods. Continued weakness in the auto industry will obviously have an effect on companies such as Rockford Acromatic, which makes after-market auto parts (though such manufacturers may also benefit from those who opt to repair their older cars rather than to buy new ones). And many older factories are still in desperate need of new equipment but too cash-strapped to purchase it. Higher energy costs mean tighter margins, which move such purchases further out into the future.

There is little reason to suspect that either presidential candidate will offer manufacturers much relief. Tax incentives for updating equipment and processes, for instance, are likely to be lower on John McCain’s list than federal funding for embryonic stem-cell research, and far below federal funding for abortion on Barack Obama’s.

This election year, small manufacturers will have to make their own future. Taking advantage of this small reprieve to make capital investments, especially those that allow them to diversify their production, can insulate them against the economic shocks that are sure to come, no matter who is elected president. ©

Letter From Thailand

by Harry Nicolaides

The Greening of the Gold Rush

It began innocently enough, like any other workshop—a large university auditorium; speakers from the United Nations, foreign business consortia, and local government; and an obscure member of the Thai royal family ringing an auspicious gong.

However, the hundreds of delegates seated in the auditorium were not savvy investors or scientists but raw-boned, palm-blistered Thai rice farmers, paid and plied with a lavish two-day luncheon and meditation sessions to hear that, if they chose to grow *Jatropha*, they could see profits within 12 months.

They were even offered free bean-sized seeds to start their own plantations and “grow a golden egg that could be passed from father to son to grandson.” However, unlike the fabled Jack who traded his mother’s cow for a handful of magic beans, these impoverished Thai farmers would be giving up a lot more than they bargained.

Much has been written about *Jatropha*, the so-called miracle plant that the *New York Times* recently called the darling of the second-generation biofuels and Goldman Sachs, the world’s largest investment bank, has identified as a promising source of biofuel in the future.

This explains why farmers in China, India, Indonesia, and Africa are being swept up in the rush to grow the *Jatropha curcas* in what can only be compared to the mass hysteria to grow tulips in the Netherlands in the late 17th century—before the speculative bubble burst.

A lot is still unknown about *Jatropha*, however.

A poisonous weed, it can grow al-

most anywhere in many climates, is known to repel insects and animals, and lives for up to 50 years. Cuttings take root quickly and easily. Some say it is a future natural disaster waiting to happen, especially if hybrid strains of the *Jatropha* species outgrow plantations and propagate wildly across farmlands, contaminating soil and displacing native species—and eventually people.

This may sound like pure fantasy—even something out of *The Day of the Triffids*—especially since others claim *Jatropha* is a miracle crop that will relieve poverty and suffering throughout the Third World by allowing the poor to cash in on a low-maintenance crop that grows anywhere.

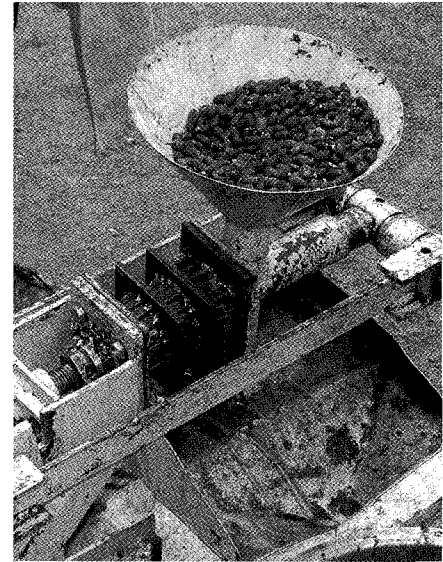
It is widely acknowledged that *Jatropha* can grow in wastelands, sand, and rocky and saline soil; however, there is no evidence that it can produce seeds in these conditions, especially in the longer term. In fact, there have not yet been any published substantive studies into the long-term benefits or effects of farming *Jatropha*.

With corporations currently sizing up *Jatropha* as a socially acceptable biofuel alternative to fossil fuels, what we do hear is the hype of a potentially billion-dollar industry—that is, billions of dollars of savings and profit for corporations and governments.

Air New Zealand, in collaboration with Rolls Royce and Boeing, has announced that by next year it will launch a test flight of a 747 powered by *Jatropha* biofuel.

Phoenix-based Honeywell Aerospace is collaborating with Airbus, Jet-Blue Airways, and others to create a *Jatropha*-based biofuel to reduce costs and increase profitability. The technology was developed from research conducted by the U.S. Defense Advanced Research Projects Agency to fuel military aircraft.

The military regime of Burma has ordered poor subsistence farmers to stop growing rice, once a major export crop, and to plant *Jatropha* as biofuel for domestic consumption and export.



Harry Nicolaides

In India, the widespread popularity of *Jatropha* farming has taken on such epidemic proportions that many are comparing the phenomenon to *Invasion of the Body Snatchers*, where townsfolk are subverted by alien imposters grown from plant-like pods.

However, not everyone is blinded by the hyperbole and hysteria. Yahoo internet groups have formed to fight the growing craze and expose the dangers of *Jatropha*. One such group based in India posted an article from the *Hindustan Times* reporting that 50 children were hospitalized after eating the popular *Jatropha* seeds from a plantation near a school.

In Australia, where *Jatropha* is regarded as an invasive weed, cultivation has been banned in two states because it is harmful to livestock, other plants, and people. Reportedly, the ingestion of as few as four small seeds can be fatal.

The virulent characteristics that make the plant such a survivor also make it a noxious weed that can threaten local ecosystems, natural habitats, and established farming communities. *Jatropha* contains the seeds of its own destruction.

In the Philippines, farmers have begun abandoning their *Jatropha* plantations after discovering poor yields and a nonexistent market for seeds.

In East Africa, where *Jatropha* is be-



ing farmed on new biofuel plantations, there is growing concern that it may spread outside of the project areas and invade adjacent farmland, with a devastating impact on the local food chain and natural biodiversity.

In Thailand, the farmers at the workshop were encouraged to plant great swathes of *Jatropha* without being told that there are no trucks, storage facilities, or refineries to process the seeds into oil. This, at a time when the Saudis, short of rice, sent a special business delegation to Thailand

to persuade the Thai government to support a Saudi-Thai joint venture that would see the Saudis renting Thai farmland to grow rice for the sole purpose of exporting the crop back to the Middle East.

More importantly, these farmers, who have toiled on their own land for generations growing rice, would lose something more precious than a few biofuel dollars if they replace traditional food crops with *Jatropha* plants.

With up to 70 percent of all Thais living and working in rural areas outside of Bangkok, rice farming is part of the traditional Thai lifestyle, history, and social system.

Thai language, art, and music reflect the importance and lyrical beauty of bristling, fertile paddies during the wet season. Each year the rice harvest is celebrated by a national festival during which family members all return home, many to Thailand's rural areas.

With rising global food prices—

caused, some say, by the unfettered farming of food crops to produce biofuels—Thai farmers growing rice will always be able to feed themselves. Biofuel profits would only be spent on a new Toyota truck or Honda motorbike, enriching those corporations and impoverishing the Thai farmers who have to run them at today's fuel prices.

And of course there are the risks with farming *Jatropha* on a large commercial scale with little research on the potential problems it may create for people, livestock, other plants, and the environment.

With many of the world's poorest nations teetering on collapse because of rising food prices and civil unrest, many more farmers will be beguiled—and subverted—by biofuel's blue-sky promise before the speculative greening of the gold rush ends.

*Harry Nicolaides is an Australian freelance writer who recently attended a two-day *Jatropha* workshop in Chiang Mai, Thailand.*



Classifying Italy

The neighbor's house sported a *prato inglese* that required ostentatious watering at the crack of dawn, and by the reassuring suppleness of the English lawn beneath our feet we all knew that our host was a gentleman, not some television mogul from Cinecittà out of Rome whom, of a morning, one would be embarrassed to see on the beach in an argument with a Ukrainian girl in tears over a broken promise. No, this was Sabaudia, where Count Volpi di Misurata let me have his summer house for a couple of weeks, and there I was, a foreign body, a foreign nobody really, at the house of the neighbor I had not met, at a party where the lawn was pure William Wordsworth and the drinks plentiful, though not so plentiful, of course, as to cast a vulgar shadow of American-style bonhomie on the host's reputation as a gentleman.

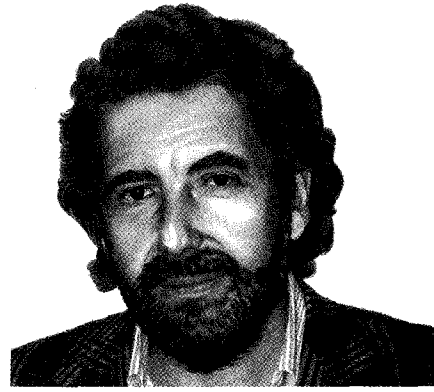
A girl I chatted up seemed susceptible enough, and nearly ten years on I remember my peroration. I had asked her if she'd ever tasted cucumbers with honey. Then it started. "What is it with you Italians," I said. "Why are you always so proper when it comes to social expression? Why is your friendly banter a Russian's idea of what goes on in a mortuary? Why is it that if I come up to an English girl and say, 'Do you come here often?' she will think I'm a moron, but when I come up to you and say, 'Do you like cucumbers with honey?' you think I'm a lunatic? You want me to ask if you come here often, don't you? You crave the reassurance of a cliché, you long for the sweet dulcimer of bourgeois propriety. Have you no intellectual shame? Just look at this parody of a lawn! You insist on gentility you can actually poke at with your toe." Unaccountably, she laughed.

It was only later that I understood why. She was the wife of one of the princes Torlonia, scions of the Roman banking family whose money is still extant and whose papal title is drier than most on the membership roster of the

Circolo della Caccia. Though middle-class by birth, she could afford to laugh at Italian society, middle-class to the marrow of its funny bone. A subsequent turn of fate was still more illuminating. Years later she left her husband and ran off with a penniless photographer friend of mine, a Russian roué who immediately made her pregnant. She has had the child and now lives in a small flat in the center of Rome, discussing life's eventualities with her decorously scandalized parents in Parioli and a Greek chorus of equally respectable girlfriends. She no longer laughs at my tirades. Italian society, for her, is no longer a joke.

There is really only one class in Italy, the middle. From the men in orange repairing a drain just beyond my window in Borgo Vecchio to the cream of local society on the opening night at the Teatro Massimo, everyone is, and is happy being, a bourgeois. "Well, that's Sicily," a scoffer may intervene. Yet I have spent the better part of 20 years in Italy, with residences in Rome, in Florence, in Venice; I have done the writer's tours of duty in Naples, in Sardinia, and in the Dolomites; I have made the idler's forays to the Argentario peninsula, the fancy emerald isles of the Bay, the *aperitivo* terraces of social skiing and climbing; and I can tell you from observation and experience that the scoffer is in all likelihood an Englishman who is thinking of buying a hillside villa in Tuscany.

The Palermo laborer has a green salad with his midday meal. In Venice the longshoreman, eating his lunch in the "Da Marissa" working men's canteen in Tre Archi, will order a plate of fruit before he takes his coffee. In Rome a motorcycle repairman may think his repast incomplete if it has not been followed with a little cheese. Imagine the reaction of the man's social counterparts in Berlin, Chicago, or Manchester, to say nothing of Warsaw or Kiev. Forever thence the full force of peer opprobrium, and phrases like *frigging salad*, *what*



kind of man, and *goddamn faggot* would be his lot wherever he went. His wife would probably leave him: "My mom knew straight off he was kind of weird." The barmaid would titter every time he ordered a beer: "You sure you wouldn't rather a pink lemonade?"

At the upper end of the social spectrum, it is the poverty of the national language that suborns the Italian mind-set, conditioning the aspirant grandee much as the sophistication of the cuisine conditions the most abject of proletarians. Like food, language is a school of life, a straightjacket to spontaneity, a denominator of class and a regulator of conduct. If there is now in Italy a repository of sensibility or attitude not inherently middle class, it is to the vanishing vocabularies of regional dialects one must look to find it.

Standard Italian has reduced communication to an exchange of cartoon bubbles, life to a series of ritualistic actions, thought to a tireless search for the kind of ideas an American newspaper editor would term appropriate. The aristocracy of Europe, historically, valued its independence of mind as it valued its right to bear arms; the lower classes, likewise, were jealous in their defense of what lares and penates had been handed them by their ancestors; only the bourgeoisie, as a newly emergent stratum, was keen to trade individual liberty for the common mean and to exchange tradition for the freedom of trade.

Tomasi di Lampedusa's view of revolution as a dream of the idle has been writ large on modern Italy ever since. That her middle class is the only one in Europe with a distinctively human face is another, longer and happier, story. ☺

Caucasian Trap

Georgian President Mikheil Saakashvili's order to attack South Ossetia's capital, Tskhinvali, was a breathtakingly audacious challenge to Russia, to which she was bound to respond forcefully. That response was promptly exploited by the American mainstream media machine and the foreign-policy community in Washington to paint Russia as a rogue power that is not only dangerous but intrinsically malignant. The vehemence of that rhetoric exceeds anything ever said or written about *jihad*, before or after September 11.

However, Russia's response was too prompt and too devastating to suggest an improvisation under the pressure of unexpected circumstances. Moscow seems to have acted in line with a plan to maneuver Washington into a position of geopolitical weakness unseen since the final days of the Carter presidency almost three decades ago.

The intent behind Georgia's attack was apparent in the name its general staff gave to the operation—"Clean Field"—and in the "shock-and-awe" assault on Tskhinvali.

Saakashvili was led to believe that he was tacitly authorized to act as he did. President George W. Bush has treated Georgia as a strategic partner ever since the Western-engineered "Rose Revolution" that brought Saakashvili to power five years ago, and last spring he strongly advocated NATO membership for Georgia. The United States and her allies (notably Israel and the Czech Republic) have armed Georgia for years, and over a hundred U.S. military advisors were actively involved at all levels of training and equipping the Georgian army. The Bush administration has repeatedly supported Georgia's "sovereignty and territorial integrity," which implies the right to use force to bring South Ossetia and Abkhazia to heel. Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice's high-profile visit to Saakashvili in Tbilisi on July 9-10 calls to mind April Glas-

pie's famous encounter with Saddam Hussein shortly before his invasion of Kuwait. Five days later, U.S. forces held a joint military exercise with the Georgian army, with more than 1,000 American troops participating.

Saakashvili may be forgiven for imagining that the United States would bail him out if things went badly. It is noteworthy that he was not disabused of such notions, Miss Rice's feeble claims to the contrary notwithstanding. The calculus in Washington appears to have been based on a win-win scenario.

Had Georgian troops occupied South Ossetia in a blitzkrieg operation modeled after Croatia's "Operation Storm" while the Russians remained hesitant or ineffective, Moscow would have suffered a major strategic and (more importantly) psychological defeat after almost four years of sustained strategic recovery following the "Orange Revolution" in Ukraine in 2004. If Russia intervened, however, she would be duly demonized, and the United States would continue to block her entry into the WTO, seek to suspend her G-8 membership, accelerate the deployment of missile-defense systems in Eastern Europe, and push for NATO expansion with new vigor. "Old" Europeans—the Germans especially—would be pressed to abandon their détente with Moscow. A resentful Georgia would become chronically anti-Russian, regardless of Saakashvili's future, thus ensuring a long-term American presence in the region.

At the time of this writing, a month after the crisis, the score appears to favor Moscow.

The Georgian army performed so poorly that a military *fait accompli* on day one was out of reach. It failed to secure the southern approaches to the Roki tunnel under the Caucasus mountains, the only land route from Russia into South Ossetia capable of handling significant military traffic. Excesses



against Ossetian civilians made the "innocent victim of aggression" narrative hard to sell.

The response came swiftly, including Moscow's formal recognition of both South Ossetia and Abkhazia on August 26, indicating that the tandem Medvedev-Putin acts smoothly in setting political objectives and achieving them militarily. Moscow stopped short of effecting a "regime change" in Tbilisi while demonstrating its ability to do so, thus creating room for third-party diplomatic initiatives. The Europeans promptly bypassed Washington, brokering a truce that was pleasing to Moscow. NATO's expansion along the Black Sea is stalled, with no major Old European power willing to risk any further complications with Russia.

Kosovo did establish a precedent, after all, one that Moscow is exploiting to its advantage while making Washington sound hypocritical when invoking international law and respect for the territorial integrity of states.

The outcome of the crisis in Georgia is a blessing in disguise for those of us who believe that America should not be "engaged" in each and every hot spot around the world. It offers further evidence that the American interest demands a sane relationship with Moscow that acknowledges that Russia has legitimate interests in her own backyard. Once those interests are recognized in Washington, the world will be a safer place. That neither likely new occupant of the White House accepts that simple fact bodes ill for global stability, in general, and for the "War on Terror," in particular, for many years to come.

POLITICS

Nobody's Bagboy

by Jack Trotter

Something curious happened in South Carolina on June 10. While Sen. Lindsay Graham easily prevailed over his challenger, Buddy Wither- spoon, garnering two thirds of the vote in the Republican U.S. Senate primary, the Democrats (voting on the same day) chose a candidate who everyone admits is well to the right of Graham himself. Of course, that's not saying much. After all, Senator Graham is the man who takes pride in a "comfortable conservatism," as he recently put it. By contrast, the conservative repast offered up by Graham's Democratic challenger, Bob Conley, is anything but comfortable. In short, Conley is staunchly pro-life, supports Second Amendment gun rights, favors strong measures against illegal immigration, and opposes "gay marriage"; but he is also adamantly opposed to what he calls the "occupation" of Iraq, advocates the complete withdrawal of American forces from the Middle East and elsewhere, blames corporate greed for the outsourcing of American jobs, supports workers' rights to organize, and opposes trade agreements that place the American worker (and American sovereignty) in jeopardy.

How did Conley, a 43-year-old pilot and engineer, manage to defeat his rival, Charleston attorney Michael Cone? Conley's socially conservative, anticorporate populism played well in rural precincts, and especially in the Upcountry, where John Edwards captured sizable Democratic majorities in the 2004 presidential primary. But since South Carolina's primaries are open to crossover voters, it is also likely that significant numbers of erstwhile Republicans have had their fill of broken Republican promises and have begun to return to the Democrat-

ic fold. If that is the case, then Conley's victory over the centrist-liberal Cone (by a narrow margin of 1,058 votes) is yet another indicator that an historic electoral shift may be under way. Forty years ago Richard Nixon saw the writing on the wall, paid court to the mandarins of country music, retooled George Wallace's populist rhetoric for the "Silent Majority," and successfully engineered the realignment that eventually brought the old solid Democratic South into the Republican camp. Until recently, it looked very much as if the Republican stranglehold on the Southern conservative vote would remain in place until the Second Coming. Then came George W. Bush and the Iraq debacle, not to mention the Katrina fiasco, amnesty for illegals, and the disappearance of U.S. manufacturing down the globalist rabbit hole. And then came the 2006 congressional elections. Under the capable if erratic leadership of Howard Dean, the Democratic National Convention began to awaken from its long electoral slumber. Remarkably, centrist and even socially conservative Democrats were receiving DNC support in districts (not only in the South, but the Midwest as well) where Republicans had ruled the roost for a generation or more. More importantly, they were getting elected. And while Conley's chances of defeating the glib and well-funded Graham may be slim, there is little doubt that the perpetually smiling senator from Central, South Carolina, is vulnerable, especially on illegal immigration.

Speaking with Conley recently in a crowded Charleston Starbucks, I asked him about his own migration out of the Republican ranks. He cast his first vote for the "Gipper" back in 1984 and remained a Republican until 1999, at which time his exit from the party "really started." It was during that year, while living in Ft. Wayne, Indiana, that he worked for Democratic mayoral candidate Graham Richard while simultaneously supporting the Reform Party effort in neighbor-

ing Michigan. By then, his belief that the Republican Party had ever been genuinely conservative had begun to wane. Today, he is certain that, Goldwater aside, "any legacy of limited government in the [GOP] is all smoke and mirrors." The much-vaunted conservative revolution during the Reagan years was largely a "myth," says Conley. As for the neoconservative regime presided over by George W. Bush, whatever conservative noises it may occasionally make, its policies say otherwise. Look at the GOP's record on immigration (legal and illegal); look at trade policy and the "unending occupation of Iraq"; consider the "bloated budgets," the "federal takeover of education," and the drug bill. In short, Conley emphatically insists, "We're looking at a party of, by, and for corporate interests, [just] as it was in its genesis."

Conley settled in North Myrtle Beach (Horry County) back in 2001, claiming as his own the state where his mother's family has lived since well before the War of Northern Aggression (as Conley terms it). His GOP membership had lapsed, but he registered with the party once again last year for the purpose of working for the Ron Paul campaign. After the February presidential primary, he left the Republicans, signed on with the Democrats, and entered the fray against Michael Cone. Needless to say, this move rankled more than a few Republican insiders, especially in Horry County, where Republican chairman Robert Rabon publicly accused Conley of "grandstanding." Yet his rationale for abandoning the GOP is well reasoned and convincing. And when I expressed some skepticism about the DNC's willingness to back genuinely conservative candidates, Conley handily rattled off an impressive list of recently elected conservative Democrats: North Carolina Rep. Heath Schuler; Pennsylvania Sen. Bob Casey, Jr.; Indiana Reps. Brad Ellsworth and Joe Donnelly; Montana Sen. John Tester; Mississippi Rep. Travis Childers; Louisiana Reps. Charlie

Melancon and Don Cazayoux; Virginia Gov. Tim Kaine; and Montana Gov. Brian Schweitzer. Several of these men are not only social conservatives but have sound views on offshoring, free-trade agreements, states' rights, and immigration. Melancon, for instance, strongly opposed the Central American Free Trade Agreement (CAFTA), while governor Schweitzer took an impressive states' rights stand against the federal government's Real ID program. "The New Democrat is the old Democrat," argues Conley. "I'm the Democrat your grandfather voted for."

Given the Republican record on trade policy and its purblind obeisance to the gospel of economic globalism, Conley may be right to assume that the Democratic Party is, by historical precedent at least, the more natural home for his brand of economic nationalism. During my interview with him, he repeatedly described himself as a "Jeffersonian" and grew positively indignant about the erosion of the U.S. manufacturing base. "I went to about a dozen different places to find a pair of black leather, soft-soled shoes that were not manufactured in communist China," he recalls, pointing emphatically at his well-worn footwear. Eventually, he found a pair manufactured in the United States. "We used to have textile jobs here [in South Carolina]," he notes, recalling a time when one could buy cheap cotton dress shirts by the dozen, manufactured in places like Gastonia, where his mother grew up in a mill house. Here in Charleston, one of the busiest ports in America, foreign-made consumer goods are flowing in from every corner of the globe, "but look at what we are exporting. Our export sheet looks more like something you'd see from an agricultural colony than [from] a First World nation," laments Conley. In this, he echoes Paul Craig Roberts, who recently pointed out that, apart from military hardware and specialized machine tools, the leading U.S. exports today are mostly farm products: corn, wheat, soybeans, hides, cotton, meat, tobacco, and rice. "Every time I drive across [the Cooper River] bridge," adds Conley, "I see the [USS]

Yorktown on one side of the harbor and all those shipping containers on the other side being unloaded from communist China. I think, look at all those fellows who were on that [flight deck] who went over there and fought . . . ; what would they think of us?"

I asked Conley for his response to the standard free-trader argument that the outcry over offshoring (or outsourcing) of American jobs is alarmist rhetoric, that in reality offshoring is "counterbalanced" by the creation of new jobs in the "high end" service sector. He sighs with a mixture of exasperation and amusement. "If [offshoring] is being 'counterbalanced,' why do we have Bill Gates going to Capitol Hill to continue to lobby for H-1Bs? There's no end in sight as to how high [members of the H-1B lob-



Bob Conley, courtesy of www.aimhighwithbob.com

by] want the cap." He is referring, of course, to the nonimmigrant visa created by the Immigration and Nationality Act, which allows employers to bring in guest workers to fill jobs in "specialty occupations"—even when qualified American workers are available. Even if the creation of new "high end" jobs were more than just a Wall Street fantasy, Conley suggests, the loss of the American manufacturing base is a disaster waiting to happen. "When we lose our manufacturing," Conley warns, "we're losing our independence. What we used to refer to as the 'arsenal of democracy' is no longer here." In short, we no longer have the industrial base to defend ourselves in the event of a full-scale war.

Conley's views on foreign policy should certainly warm the cockles of paleoconservative hearts. He

is convinced that the Iraqi "occupation" was a mistake from the beginning. Saddam Hussein, he quips, was at least "an equal-opportunity oppressor." Once there was a thriving Christian community in Iraq. "Saddam's foreign minister was a Catholic . . . and now we've witnessed the decimation of that ancient Christian population." Though he mentioned no timetable, he would like to see a complete withdrawal of U.S. forces from the Middle East. "There's not going to be any stability there until the American arsonist that struck the match and started the fire leaves the neighborhood." He advocates a similar withdrawal from Europe and from South Korea. Regarding the latter, he notes, "They have twice the population and 40 times the economy of North Korea. It's been 47 years since Eisenhower left office. Last year we exported fewer than 40,000 vehicles to South Korea and imported 800,000. . . . I think they have a good enough economy that they can afford to buy a few boots and a few bullets and defend themselves. It's time to bring our boys home."

In spite of his surprising victory over Cone, Conley remains a virtual unknown to South Carolina voters, while the well-funded Graham with his unctuous Sunday-school charm seems to have become a permanent fixture on the national news-talk circuit (dolled up, as one pundit has noted, with "more make-up than Tammy Faye Bakker"). Yet Conley's conviction that Graham can be beaten or at least seriously damaged is infectious. In the first place, Graham has aligned himself so closely with the hopelessly inept John McCain that his fortunes are likely to rise or fall with those of the senator from Arizona: "[Graham is] out of touch. He's out there gallivanting with McCain as his personal valet and bagboy. Just turn on the tube. If you see Senator McCain, you're going to see Señor Grahamnesty." Even more potentially damaging for Graham is his "bipartisan" willingness to compromise on illegal immigration. Against the will of a majority of South Carolinians he backed the failed Kennedy-McCain Comprehensive Immi-

gration Reform Act (2007) and (claims Conley) has since then voted an additional seven times “to import more foreign nationals to take [American] jobs.” Conley also believes that Graham is vulnerable on his support for the PATRIOT Act and his failure to “step up” and defend the Marriage Protection Act approved by the House of Representatives in 2004. The purpose of the act was to strip the federal courts of any jurisdiction over the Defense of Marriage Act (1996), thus returning questions of marriage to state courts and legislators, but after its passage by a substantial majority (233-194), it died in the Senate Judiciary Committee, of which Graham was a member.

Even if “Flattop Bob” (a nickname derived from his signature military haircut) fails to unseat Graham, there is a good possibility that he will make a respectable showing and survive to fight another day, whether as a Democrat or as a third-party candidate. For the time being, he is proud to call himself a Democrat in the old Southern tradition. Perhaps this is simply a measure of his disgust at “being so used and abused by these Rockefeller Republicans who have no more use for us paleos today than they did for Bob Taft.” Back in the Reagan years, says Conley, the GOP “gave us a seat on the bus; then they moved us populist, traditional Christian values, middle-class folks to the back seat; then they gave us a two-by-four on the bumper; and then they took our seat and started dragging us on a chain. How much longer is it going to be before folks cut the chain?” The problem, of course, is that the same worm has eaten away the substance of both major American political parties. Each is now irrevocably the instrument of the transnationalists who control the markets and the media, none of whom have the slightest interest in serving the genuine interests of the American people. Indeed, it is highly questionable whether there any longer exists, in any significant sense, an “American people.” Conley speaks of a Jeffersonian America, a decentralized republic of thriving “townships” and sturdy, vigilant citizens zealous for their liberties. This is

at once a noble ideal and, at this late date, a crippling fantasy. The dismantling of the American imperium will not, I am afraid, take place under the auspices of either the Republican or the Democratic parties. For the purpose of the American political duopoly is not to generate real change but to neutralize it. However, I fervently hope that Bob Conley and his like prove me wrong.

*Jack Trotter writes from
Charleston, South Carolina.*

Carolina Courage

by Jeff Minick

“**T**his all sounds fanatical if people don’t know about it. I’m not a radical person.”

Despite her critics, and despite the rough reelection campaign she faces in Charlotte this fall, U.S. Rep. Sue Myrick (R-NC, 9th District) has spent the last two years fighting to bring her concerns before Congress and the American people. In my telephone interview with her on June 14, she repeated her usual disclaimer—“I know how this sounds to some people”—but then proceeded in hard, clear language to denounce both Islamic terrorism and the recent attempts by certain Islamic organizations to infiltrate various government agencies.

Myrick spoke first of the bipartisan Congressional Anti-Terrorism Caucus, which she founded and which she chairs along with Robert “Bud” Cramer (D-AL), Kay Granger (R-TX), and Jane Harman (D-CA). At the founding of the caucus on January 30, 2007, Myrick stated that “my hope . . . is to spur an elevated national dialogue on this issue so that we can unite as Americans did during World War II.” When I asked if she might elaborate on this goal, Myrick explained that she and the others had begun the antiterrorism caucus as an educational tool for members of Congress and their staffs, so that they might more fully understand domestic terrorism and

share that knowledge with their constituents.

Their efforts have certainly attracted attention. Over the past 18 months, the caucus has doubled its original roster of 67 members, while sponsoring many talks by experts on terrorism and jihadist ideology.

In recent months, Myrick has battled Islamic terrorism in more controversial ways. On April 16, she called on Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice to revoke the passport of former President Jimmy Carter after Carter met with leaders of Hamas, officially regarded by the United States and by many other countries as a terrorist organization. In the West Bank town of Ramallah, Carter had embraced Hamas official Nasser Shaer. (In reporting this incident, MSNBC was quick to explain that “embraces between men are a common custom in Arab culture.”)

Even more recently, Representative Myrick called a press conference to issue her own “Wake Up America” agenda, a list of ten recommendations that she and some advisors devised to fight the infiltration of American institutions by radical Muslims:

1. Will call for a government investigation of all US military chaplains who were approved by Abdurahman Alamoudi [who was imprisoned for funding a terrorist organization].
2. Will call for a government investigation of all US prison chaplains who were approved by Abdurahman Alamoudi.
3. Will call for the Government Accounting Office (GAO) to investigate the selection process of Arabic translators in the FBI and Department of Defense.
4. Will call for the Internal Revenue Service to investigate the Council on American-Islamic Relations’ (CAIR) 501(c)(3) non-profit status which restricts “lobbying on behalf of a foreign government”.
5. Will introduce a bill to make the preaching, publication, or distribution of materials that call for the death of

American citizens, attacks on the United States Government or Armed Forces, or the financing of the means and/or operations to accomplish these acts, acts of sedition and/or solicitation of treason.

6. Will call on the Government Accountability Office to conduct an audit to verify the total sovereign wealth fund investment in the United States.

7. Will attempt to cancel scholarship student visa program with Saudi Arabia until they reform their textbooks [Myrick and many others claim that Saudi textbooks preach hatred and violence against non-Muslims].

8. Will introduce a bill to restrict R-1/R-2 religious visas for imams who come from countries that do not allow reciprocal visits by non-Muslim clergy.

9. Will introduce a bill to cancel contracts to train Saudi police and other security forces in US Counterterrorism tactics until the Saudi's [*sic*] certify the prosecution of Al Qaeda financiers, like Yasin al-Kadi, and the detention of repatriated Guantanamo terrorists that keep being released into the general population after being "rehabilitated".

10. Will introduce or sponsor a bill to block the sale of sensitive military munitions, especially Joint Direct Attack Munitions (JDAMs), to Saudi Arabia.

Although even some moderate Muslims applauded Myrick's recommendations, Jibril Hough of the Islamic Center of Charlotte called Myrick's plan and her concerns a new brand of McCarthyism—or, as he put it, Myrickism. Myrick told me that she had met with Hough and a local imam only two weeks before our own interview, but the parties reached no consensus.

Myrick explained the principal danger of allowing the points she has raised to go uninvestigated. "They don't have to attack us again," she said.

"They are taking over on the inside."

We spoke then of Europe and of the vast changes taking place within the European Union and in individual countries in terms of free speech, tolerance, and the marketplace of ideas. Myrick briefly addressed the demographic decline of the Europeans *vis-à-vis* the flood of Muslims into that population. Unlike many Americans, she was fully aware that the populations of such places as Greece and Italy are suffering from a birth dearth and are in severe decline. She then turned to the role played by an abstract commitment to tolerance in the loss of freedom both in Europe and in America. "It's political correctness again," she said. "They use our own freedoms against us . . . We need to keep discussion and ideology out there. People don't realize the long-term planning involved here."

Her response brought to mind the recent attempts by CAIR (several of whose officials have been convicted of terrorist-related activities) to downplay Islamic terrorism and violence. In 2007, CAIR released a statement asserting that "there is a common misperception among Westerners . . . that the Quran teaches violence," a remark that any rank-amateur student of the Koran and history would find ludicrous. In response to criticism from certain Islamic groups, the State Department recently published "Words That Work and Words That Don't," in which government officials and employees are advised to change the vocabulary with which they address terrorism. ("Don't invoke Islam" and "Don't harp on Muslim Identity" are two of the injunctions in this document.)

"More political correctness," Myrick replied to me. "We've all agreed to ignore them."

Myrick urges all Americans to educate themselves on the subject of radical *jihad* and Islamic terrorism. When I asked her to recommend some books to readers unfamiliar with these topics, she quickly named three titles. "*Infiltration* by Paul Sperry is excellent. It's easy to read and filled with facts about the current infiltration of the government."

In addition, she recommended Peter Feaman's *Wake Up America!* and Mark Steyn's best-seller, *America Alone*, as books accessible to readers who are new to this threat.

The diminutive Myrick was born and raised in Tifton, Ohio, where she attended Heidelberg College for a year. After marrying and then moving to Charlotte, North Carolina, she reared a family—she has two children, three stepchildren, twelve grandchildren, and five great-grandchildren. In Charlotte she founded an advertising and public-relations agency and eventually served for two terms as mayor of that city, where voters still remember her for improving the city's infrastructure without raising taxes and for personally confronting drug dealers in certain impoverished neighborhoods. Since 1995, she has served as a representative for North Carolina's 9th District. During her years on the Hill she has served in various capacities, including as a member of the powerful Energy and Commerce Committee. Her bout with breast cancer turned her into a champion of cancer research and legislation. In addition, her outspoken stances on controversial issues have made her one of the leading lights for American conservatives in government today.

When asked why she had put forth her "Wake Up, America" plan during an election year, as her controversial ideas may hurt her campaign since so many Americans seem tired of hearing about war and terrorism, Myrick replied, "Because I am seriously concerned about the infiltration threats we face and about the future of our grandchildren."

Sue Myrick is that rare politician with heart and backbone, a gutsy lady who understands the meaning of the word *duty*. In her willingness to perform such thankless tasks as fighting domestic terrorism, she has helped protect the interests of the American people and has brought honor to the members of her congressional district and to the state of North Carolina.

Jeff Minick writes from Asheville, North Carolina.

A Rough Sea Petrified

Warning: In the review that follows, I have given away any number of plot points of the film.

In *Vicky Cristina Barcelona*, Woody Allen has traveled farther from his beloved Manhattan than ever before but not an inch from his perennial obsession: the ordeal of passion in a world of regimented emotions.

Allen has made great comedies out of the fooleries that befall passion's victims, but here he's turned serious and seems to have lost his focus.

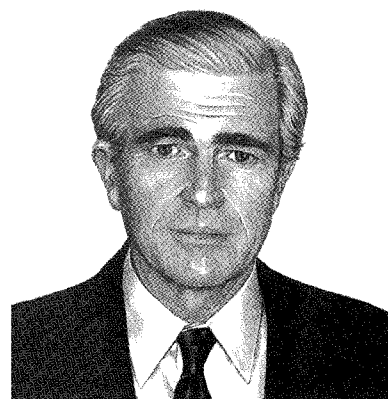
His narrative concerns two young women summering in Barcelona: Vicky, a student of Catalonia, and Cristina, a student of, well, herself. When Vicky was 14, she fell in love with the city's architecture by the Catholic visionary Antoni Gaudi, especially his still unfinished church, El Temple Expiatori de la Sagrada Família (The Church of the Holy Family) begun in 1883 and scheduled to be completed in 2026. The structure is to play its part in Vicky's master's thesis on "the Catalan identity." This sounds impressive until we learn she speaks neither Catalan nor Spanish. Cristina, who is not as ambitiously intellectual as Vicky, is easily her friend's equal when it comes to wholly unearned self-importance. After breaking up with her most recent boyfriend, she's made a film to answer a simple question: "Why is love so hard to define?" Lasting all of 12 minutes, her on-screen investigation, she glumly admits, failed to find an answer. We get the picture. Vicky and Cristina are spoiled Americans: One is driven; the other, drifting.

Allen has chosen his actresses well. As Vicky, Rebecca Hall exudes responsibility. Tall and angular, she's as nervously alert as a high-stepping crane. Scarlett Johansson is, as always, her vacant self with her dream-bleared eyes and plump, pouting mouth ever open in mild surprise.

Allen's American actresses are thor-

oughly upstaged by his Catalan setting. His scenes frequently and emphatically include shots of Gaudi's *art nouveau* architecture with its surreal candle-drip exteriors. And yet, curiously, he never clearly articulates Gaudi's role. No less an observer than Evelyn Waugh might have helped him on this score. In 1929 Waugh described Gaudi's Holy Family church as looking like a "clumsily iced cake," improbably rendering the "evanescent" in the medium of stone. Of Gaudi's other buildings, Waugh wrote that their audacious modernist "undulations" reminded him of "a rough sea petrified." Waugh meant these bizarre comparisons as compliments to an artist whom he judged to have honestly rendered the passionate, comic confusion of the modern condition. Since Allen's film is all about the attempt to come to terms with contemporary passion, it would seem he meant to use Gaudi's works analogically to celebrate wayward yearning in stone. Yet his camera often seems content with glimpsing Gaudi's works as little more than a fortuitous background to his story. None of his characters, for instance, ever pronounces the name of the Holy Family church. This is odd since the church naturally provides a starkly ironic counterpoint to the profane and literally degenerate anti-family ménage they establish in the film's third act. Perhaps Allen wants us to connect the dots for ourselves. His script seems severely underwritten, and his own remarks have been ambiguous, inviting viewers to read into his film whatever they want. There's only one certainty: The movie exists at the intersection of art and passion.

At an exhibition, the ladies spy an artist slouching elegantly against a wall—Juan Antonio (Javier Bardem), sporting a carefully maintained three-day beard. Not long ago his wife stabbed him in a fit of furious jealousy, provoking a messy, well-publicized divorce. So authentic, so pas-



Vicky Cristina Barcelona

*Produced and distributed by
The Weinstein Company*

Written and directed by Woody Allen

sionate—not the dull, lawyerly crafted American canard: irreconcilable differences. Later, spotting him in a restaurant, Cristina keeps looking over at him until he finally approaches their table and, without preliminaries, invites them to spend the weekend with him in Oviedo, where they will eat well, drink good wine, and make love. Vicky sarcastically inquires who will be making this love. "Why, all of us, hopefully," the sleepy-eyed Lothario replies. Laughing at his audacity, Vicky points out that, even if she were remotely interested, she is engaged. Cristina, on the other hand, likes the idea. "At least he's not a factory-made model," she confides to her cautious friend. Vicky's lawyer fiancé, with his conventional good looks and dutiful attentiveness to her whims, is clearly a product rolled off the all-American assembly line. An hour later, Juan is flying the girls to his proposed idyll through a thunderstorm. Here as elsewhere, Allen equates passion with danger. Well, he is 73.

Upon reaching Oviedo, Cristina is stricken with a very unromantic case of food poisoning that forces her to take ingloriously to her hotel bed quite alone. This leaves Vicky in Juan's caring hands. He graciously shows her the city's art and architecture. At one point, he takes her to the Cathedral of San Salvador. As they stand before a sculpted crucifix, Vicky remarks, "So

you're religious." No, not at all. Juan admires the art for its own sake. Existence, he assures her, has no meaning. In this absence of purpose, he explains, "The trick is to enjoy life." Vicky is charmed by Juan's neopagan seize-the-day philosophy and drinks a bit too much wine at dinner, the better to succumb to his attentions. The next morning, she is a new woman. When her suddenly tedious fiancé makes his daily call to tell her how much he loves her, she pretends her cell phone is losing its signal and cuts him off. But it is to no purpose: Cristina has recovered, and Juan has rushed to her side. He soon achieves his original aim of sleeping with both Americans—only, sadly, not at once. Impulsively, however, Cristina moves in with him.

Enter Juan's former wife, Maria Elena (Penélope Cruz), an emotional maelstrom wrecking all in her path. She is mad in both senses of the word, hurling insults at Cristina and threatening Juan with yet another knife. But what is Juan to do? She has recently attempted suicide. He must take her in. When Cristina reproaches Juan for allowing Maria into their ménage, he tries to explain his continuing commitment to his former wife. He has always loved Maria, but there was something missing. "It's like a recipe. If one ingredient is missing, it doesn't work. Like, like . . . salt."

Cristina soon finds out what her lover means. She is the missing ingredient in Juan's relationship with the mad Maria, the dash of salt that will make the recipe come together. As the days pass, Maria, an artist herself, teaches the American the finer points of photography. As she does so, she reveals that she's warmed by the sounds of her former husband making love to Cristina at night. Then one afternoon, while working in the blood-red light of the darkroom, the women share a passionate kiss. Soon they are double-teaming Juan. The ever-respectable Allen has satisfied himself with filming the three engaging in some preliminary canoodling, leaving their presumably more ardent bedroom antics unseen. In a perverse way this episode suggests that the unformed, in-

fantile Cristina has become the child Maria and Juan so conspicuously do not have, the missing ingredient in their relationship. Hence Maria's fury a couple of weeks later, when Cristina finally regains her wits and decides to leave their household. Maria screams over and over, "She's a spoiled sh-t!" She is like a formerly doting but foul-mouthed mother upon learning her favorite child, whose diapers she once so attentively changed, has heartlessly deserted her.

I don't know that Allen intends this reading of events. If not, I suspect he's wandered into territory he doesn't fully grasp. All of his films have concerned the fragility of romance. Because his lovers, married or not, almost never have children, they are "free" to focus interminably and quite destructively on their relationships. It's the New York affair—15 minutes making love, followed by 45 on the edge of the bed discussing its meaning, love's sure death sentence. Those who are inconvenienced by offspring are portrayed as hopelessly trapped in middle-class hypocrisy when it comes to their true feelings. Take the dentist protagonist of *Crimes and Misdemeanors*. When his mistress threatens the stability of his family, he has her killed. In *Vicky Cristina* the obverse obtains. Children, or the prospect of children, threaten to kill headlong passion. When Vicky's fiancé calls from America to propose unexpectedly that they marry in Barcelona, he seems at first uncharacteristically romantic. But then he goes on to say how great it will be to tell their children that they did something so impulsive in their youth. You can see Vicky's face sag at the mention of children.

So, if children are inimical to passion, what is the lesson? Obviously, don't reproduce. Seems more than a little self-indulgent, not to mention socially impractical. Yet it is the personal preference of so many of today's young Europeans that demographers increasingly question their civilization's survival. But if you are convinced that life has no meaning and that the trick is to enjoy it while you can, then there is nothing stop-

ping you from making a case for untrammelled hedonism. This may mean using a perversely willing surrogate to make up for the missing ingredient of offspring, but, hey, when it comes to sex, the more the merrier, right? A little icky? Well, Allen's films are often autobiographical, and considering his current wife was his stepchild while he was married to Mia Farrow, it's difficult not to draw the connections.

And yet there is something more here—Maria Elena, who is convinced that "only unfulfilled love can be romantic." The result of that proposition is madness, which, in Maria Elena's case, is at once homicidal and suicidal, the complete death wish. She's been left by her hedonist husband to search everywhere for a missing ingredient that she all the while carries within her. Cruz renders Maria's predicament quite convincingly, with her bedraggled hair and scowling mouth. Although far prettier, she reminded me of Anna Magnani in one of her tempestuous roles from the 50's, a woman so besieged by her misdirected sexuality that she is ready to cut someone's heart out. Cruz makes Maria undeniably beautiful at moments, but she's more often a curdled, venomous harridan whose inability to identify what she wants has left her volcanically angry at the world, in general, and Juan, in particular. Denied the prospect of offspring, she is utterly lost in what used to be called depravity. Cruz's performance nearly saves the film by bringing into the foreground the consequences of pursuing passion for its own sake. She takes the hammer of emotional truth to the self-indulgent tolerance the other characters so urbanely affect.

Allen seems to have rethought his earlier commitment to pursuing passion wherever it leads. But like Cristina, he still doesn't seem to know what he wants. He clearly has not taken the next obvious step away from the madness of self-involvement. One answer to his confusion could have been found in the film's background. It is implicit in the ongoing dedication of those constructing Gaudi's Church of the Holy Family, which stands in vivid contrast to Juan's anti-family. ◊

Reprise in Vegas

The long drive from Belen to Rancho Juárez seemed to Héctor an endless agony. He found the place in the greatest confusion, AveMaría vacillating between grim determination and hysterics as she packed a suitcase, Jesús “Eddie” tramping back and forth in the sitting room, shaking his fist and vowing to track down Contracepción’s fiendish paramour and tear his head from his body. Amid the uproar, only Beatriz Juárez seemed calm and unperturbed, while Dubya, having caught over and again the word *Vegas* in the otherwise unfathomable back-and-forth, raced from one end of the house to the other on all fours, emitting leonine roars in between ear-splitting shouts of “¡Leones! ¡Leones! ¡Deseo visitar mas leones—muchos, MUCHOS leones!” For an instant, the relief Héctor derived from the thought that he and his family would shortly be leaving this terrible establishment was compensation (almost) for the dread he felt at the prospect of visiting Las Vegas again.

While his wife was putting up a box supper to bring with them on the overnight drive to Nevada, she gave her husband the facts of the case as she knew it, which turned out to be little enough. Contracepción had spent the hours immediately following her father’s departure for Belen in the bedroom, listening to Britney Spears and reading and writing e-mails on her laptop. At around eleven-thirty, AveMaría had put her head through the door to ask if she wished to accompany Dubya and herself to the Wal-Mart in Deming, and afterward for lunch at Tacos Mirasol. As the restaurant was a favorite of Contracepción’s, her mother was surprised when the girl declined the invitation, explaining—in rather mysterious tones, her mother recalled—that she had important mail needing to be answered immediately. AveMaría, who thought this a reasonable explanation at the time,

had left at once for Deming with Dubya. They had spent nearly two hours at the store (forty-five minutes buying groceries and household necessities, an hour and fifteen minutes while AveMaría shopped the women’s clothing department for holiday discounts) and gone on to enjoy a leisurely lunch lasting an hour and a half at Tacos Mirasol. Finally, the drive home had taken twenty minutes. At the house, they had been met by Beatriz, who’d just got home herself from the Pink Store where she’d met Jesús “Eddie” for lunch on his noontime break at the border to discover Contracepción’s handwritten note on the kitchen table, weighted by an exhausted bottle of Paul Mitchell hair spray. The women’s first thought had been that Contracepción had been kidnapped and forced by the kidnapper to write a runaway note. But AveMaría pointed out that most criminals, suffering as they did from low IQ, were too unintelligent to think of so clever a ruse. The note, unambiguously in Contracepción’s hand, explained that she had gone to Vegas with a famous talent scout who’d promised to make her a singing star. Not to worry, it added: Siggy had assured her Britney was washed up in Vegas, and she’d grab off all her bookings in a couple of months. Once she was a star, Contracepción promised, she’d buy her parents a big home in Vegas and a fancy new car each. Fortunately, AveMaría had phoned her husband in Belen before calling the police—an act, Héctor reminded her, whose surefire result would be their daughter’s arrest on a charge of having violated her probation in Belen.

The Villas got started for Las Vegas shortly before 11 p.m. Héctor began by trying to talk Jesús “Eddie” out of coming with them. But when persuasion failed, he put his foot down with a firmness and decision his friend had never seen in him before, so that, in the end, he backed off like a hye-



na confronted by a lion. Héctor had worked out the distance by road at 624 miles, for an estimated ten-and-a-half or eleven hours’ driving time. It would have been helpful to have a clue as to where, in a city of 600,000 people, his daughter and Siggy were likely to be found, but Héctor thought he had a pretty fair idea. Before getting in the car, he’d typed the words “Britney Spears” and “Las Vegas” into Google and discovered that Britney had performed her “Dream With in a Dream” World Tour at the MGM Grand Hotel in 2002. It was a start, at least, though for him the most unpleasant one imaginable. Perhaps, it had occurred to him, he’d be unrecognizable to anyone—including Juanito Villalobos—in disguise as a keeper at the Lion Habitat. Why—Héctor anguished—had his beloved Contracepción gone and visited this terrible ordeal upon him?

He drove as far as Tucson, where AveMaría took over while Héctor tried to get some sleep and Dubya snored wetly in the back seat. In Phoenix they stopped for gas at a convenience store, and the boy, awakened, bought a stuffed lion that took up most of the back seat of the Subaru. From Phoenix, Héctor drove the remaining 287 miles on to Vegas, keeping awake with strong coffee and the radio set low. He turned it off finally near Williams, Arizona, when the D.J. put a Britney song, “I’m Not a Girl, Not Yet a Woman,” on the air. At a little before noon they arrived in Las Vegas, where Héctor steered directly for the MGM Grand and was nearly run into by a chartered Greyhound bus on the way to the ho-

tel. “¡Leones! ¡O-o-o mis leones!” Dubya began shouting as soon as he recognized the place.

Héctor had decided, on the dull desert drive from Phoenix, to book a room at the MGM, even though, as his bank account stood these days, he could hardly afford it. (What else was plastic for, he reminded himself.) The hotel was familiar territory, as well as a prime attraction for Britney wannabes. While Dubya had dozed the last fifty miles into town, his father and Ave-María had agreed that she and the boy would establish an observation post in the hotel lobby at a convenient distance from the Lion Habitat, while Héctor checked out the musical entertainment being offered that week. A sense of the most extreme urgency impelled both parents. Nothing less than their daughter’s virginity was at stake, while even now they might be too late, the sacred cause already lost—and forever!

After a half-hour’s search undertaken on one of the house computers, Héctor understood that, if Brit-

ney Spears really were in town this week, she wasn’t booked to sing anywhere. Sir Elton John and Céline Dion were playing at Caesars Palace, and Barry Manilow was at The Hilton with “Manilow: Music and Passion.” Thunder From Down Under, the male revue from Australia, was performing at The Excalibur, and The Mirage offered The Beatles’ “LOVE,” while The Chippendales had been booked at the Rio and the MGM itself offered “La Femme,” imported direct from the Crazy Horse in Paris. Where Contracep and Siggie might possibly fit into any of this, Héctor had no idea. He could, he realized in despair, hang out for months on end at these shows—to the tune of \$59.95 to several hundred bucks a pop—without ever catching sight either of his daughter or her showbiz boyfriend, whom he wouldn’t recognize from a zoo keeper with a pooper-scooper over his shoulder. If he was going to find Contracepción, and in time (the act was hardly a lengthy one, especially with a young male), Héctor could not afford to wander blind around

downtown Las Vegas. He needed to think like Philip Marlowe in *The Big Sleep*, played by Humphrey Bogart, accustomed to tracking seedy people in seedy places like L.A. (a town Héctor had always deplored as hopelessly Mexicanized in a sordid low-class way, an American Juárez on steroids).

The name Marlowe suggested alcohol and tobacco, and thoughts of both put Héctor in mind of a drink, considered by some health experts he’d read to be conducive to mental concentration when indulged in with restraint. Therefore, having ascertained that Ave-María and Dubya, fortified by colas and a bag of fried pork rinds, were at their post in the lobby, he ducked into Zuri, a martini bar open 24 hours a day, where, on the recommendation of the barman, he ordered a gin gimlet with Rose’s Lime Juice, straight up.

The gimlet, of which he had been initially skeptical, proved exotic but delicious. Further to concentrate his mind by distracting it from the gorgeous, near-naked females who came and went in the bar, Héctor request-

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ed a cigar from Zuri's signature humidor and sat with it above crossed arms, thinking. When he felt the gin infusing his brain so as to induce thought, he ordered a second gimlet and went on thinking. But the harder he tried to think, the more petrified his brain seemed to become, while, the more he drank to soften it up, the more squashily recalcitrant it grew. Héctor consulted his watch and read the time: five-thirty. Already half a day had been wasted, and he was getting that way himself. What kind of a father would sit all afternoon at a bimbo bar while his own daughter was being deflowered? Héctor called for the check and was numbly trying to calculate a fair tip when two girls flounced in and perched themselves on the two tall seats to his right. Rather, they would have flounced had they been wearing skirts instead of a slightly more modest version of thong panties below and pasties above. The girls looked to him to be very young—hardly older, if at all, than Contracepción, Héctor thought. Both of them acted over-excited, tossing their hairdos from side to side and talking even more expressively with their manicured hands than with their gaping painted mouths. To his astonishment, the barman accepted their orders of two infused vodkas without requesting IDs. While he was away preparing the drinks, both girls took wallets from their pocketbooks and drew out what looked like identical business cards to admire, turning them over and over in their hands and giggling hysterically. Héctor glanced sideways at the nearer girl. Her card read:

USA WORLD SHOWCASE
3960 HOWARD HUGHES PKWY #500
LAS VEGAS, NEVADA 89109
CORPORATE OFFICE: (702) 400-6315

He returned to his study of the check and decided to leave 20 percent, as it was easier to calculate than fifteen. That was when he overheard one of the girls squealing, "Oh, Danele, I just, like, know we've got it made with Justin! He's hot for me—I could, like, feel the body heat, y'know? He's all set

to book us at The Mirage now, without even waiting for the World Showcase, soon as I—you know"—she giggled again, and gave her friend a knowing dig with her elbow—"give him a little of what it is he's really after!"

Héctor's instincts, working above the gin, responded in the instant. On impulse, he turned in his seat to address the girl directly.

"Can I please have a look at that card for a second?" he asked her.

The two of them stared at each other in astonishment, then burst into laughter.

"So, like, what are you auditioning for?" the first girl demanded, and covered her mouth with her hand.

"I just want to write that address down, if you don't mind," Héctor told her.

Over the next three days, he and AveMaría combed the city of Las Vegas, traipsing from one booking agency to the next in search of anyone who might have been approached by Siggy and Contracepción while Dubya passed the time at the Lion Habitat, supervised by a nanny who charged \$25 an hour in her job. Héctor had not realized that Las Vegas was so big, nor that it embraced talent enough to keep so many scouts and booking agents in business. It was no doubt on account of business pressures that most of them were dismissively impatient and rude, except on those occasions when they mistook him for an ethnic character actor looking for work of the "*¡Ay Chihuahua!*" variety.

Typically short, bald-headed, and sweating, with circular waistlines tented in loud shirts, they lurked like moray eels in cramped, smelly offices amid steel filing cabinets, guarded by professional-looking secretaries (professional as in the oldest profession, Héctor thought). For three full days, from nine in the morning until five at night, they approached these dragons, patiently and somewhat apologetically. No, no one by the name of Siggy or Contracepción ("Is that name for real?") had stopped by the office. ("I'd remember that one, buddy, believe me!") "What do you think I am, a lousy private dick?" At the end of the first day, he and AveMaría were close to tears; at the conclusion of the second, they had nearly given up hope, less of finding Contracep in the end than of rescuing her innocence on which they were aware the meter was ticking, as on their mounting hotel bill. By the evening of day three, both parents were in despair, and Héctor talked of calling the police as a measure of last resort.

Nervously as well as physically exhausted, they dragged themselves back to the MGM Grand, where Dubya and the nanny awaited them near the front desk. The little boy spied them first and raced forward across the lobby, knocking the knees of gathered couples who stared after him disapprovingly.

"*¡Mamá! ¡Papá!* I found Contracep—I saw her, I did! She's over there with the *leones* at the Lion Habitat!"

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